THOMAS REID

ESSAYS ON THE ACTIVE POWERS OF MAN

Edited by
Knud Haakonssen
and
James A. Harris

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THE EDINBURGH EDITION OF THOMAS REID

General Editor
Knud Haakonssen

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CONTENTS

Preface vii

Editors' introduction ix

Note on the text xxiii

Mode of reference xxvi

Critical text 1

Essays on the Active Powers of Man 2

Contents 3

Introduction 5

Essay I Of Active Power in General 7

Essay II Of the Will 46

Essay III Of the Principles of Action 74

Essay IV Of the Liberty of Moral Agents 196

Essay V Of Morals 270

Bibliography 364

Index of names 371

General index 376

PREFACE

Prefaces to scholarly works are commonly obituaries to time past. However, time past is not always time lost. This volume has undoubtedly taken longer than one of the editors – KH – would like to dwell on, for it is nearly a decade since he and Derek Brookes presented the companion volume, Reid's *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, to the public. But, in that time, not only has the present work secured the co-editorship of JH, but technology has made some earlier editorial plans happily obsolete. The Preface to the *Intellectual Powers* intimated that the present work would include manuscript material germane to both volumes, because they were conceived as a unity by the author and because the *Active Powers*, being the smaller work, could better accommodate such material. In the meantime, nearly all of Reid's relevant manuscripts have been made available on the website of the University of Aberdeen (cf. the Introduction, p. xxv below), and this has led to a rethinking of the previous plan.

Instead of printing transcriptions of a selection of manuscripts, we have created a guide to the manuscripts in the notes to the text, so that the interested reader can follow up on points of particular interest. The Reid manuscripts are of such extent and complication that such an exercise has to be selective and consequently done from the point of view of the editors, but this would obviously be even more the case with the printing of manuscripts, however generous. This decision should not be seen as belittling the importance of the manuscripts; to the contrary, we are elated that the reader is now able to make much more comprehensive use of this material than we could ever hope to achieve by reproduction of material and to do so guided by his or her own interests. The basic editorial principle has been to leave Reid's intentions as clear as possible for the reader to interpret, and this can often be done by encouraging the pursuit of manuscripts that identify matters only alluded to in the final text and that indicate the development of arguments.

In preparing this edition, we have incurred several debts of gratitude. Above all, we have benefited greatly from the assistance and advice of M. A. Stewart and Paul B. Wood, who have been unstinting in sharing their expertise in matters great and small pertaining to Reid in particular

and editing in general. Several others have been ready with particular advice: Sarah Broadie, John Cairns, Giovanni Grandi, John Haldane, Stephen Halliwell, Rob Iliffe, Michael Lobban, Alex Long, Martino Squilante. Grants from the Scots Philosophical Club and from the School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies at St Andrews helped considerably with the costs of producing a typescript of the text. For one of the editors – KH – the present work is part of a more extensive project, for which he has the generous support of The Leverhulme Trust. The staff of Aberdeen University's Historical Collections were helpful with access to manuscript material in their keep. Åsa Söderman assisted with the final preparation of the typescript. Jennifer Brown helped tirelessly with the proof-reading. We thank them all and relieve them of all responsibility for the final state of the work.

Knud Haakonssen
James Harris
June 2010

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Thomas Reid's *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* was his last major publication, appearing in 1788 when the author was seventy-eight. However, it did have roots early in his intellectual life, and there is evidence to show that he kept developing his ideas in moral philosophy in several phases of his career. The earliest preserved manuscripts outlining themes that remained in the *Active Powers* are dated 1736, when Reid was a librarian at Marischal College, Aberdeen, soon to become a minister in the Church of Scotland at New Machar. [1] However, it was as regent at King's College, Aberdeen, from 1751 to 1764, that Reid had to develop the subject of moral philosophy systematically. Unfortunately, the documentation of what he taught in Aberdeen is scanty indeed. [2] In the first of his graduation orations for his class, he implied a division of moral philosophy into speculative ethics, which dealt with 'the causes, origin, and nature of virtue', and practical ethics, which provided an exposition of the duties of life, and this distinction remained fundamental to him in all his subsequent thought. [3] We also know that he saw Socrates, Cicero and Joseph Butler as particularly valuable, and we may infer the importance to him of Francis Hutcheson and of his teacher, George Turnbull. It was, however, first in his papers to the Aberdeen Philosophical Society that he developed themes that would be formative for the *Active Powers*. In fact, the final four chapters of the work were derived from such presentations, as Reid himself explains.[4]

1. Reid wrote some brief 'Minutes of a Philosophical Club' in which several of his continuing themes were discussed with reference to Locke, Leibniz, Bishop King and Samuel Clarke. See note 1, p. 196 and note 46, p. 253, below. For other early manuscripts of relevance, see notes 1, p. 7 and note 1, p. 46. For an overview of the development of Reid's ethics in general, see the Editor's Introduction to *Reid on Practical Ethics*. For full bibliographical details, see the Bibliography.
2. For Reid's 'Scheme of a Course of Philosophy' in 1752, see 8/V/1, 1–4 (in *Reid and the University*). Concerning references to manuscripts, see the note on 'Mode of reference', p. xxvi, below. For the Aberdeen curriculum, see P. Wood, *The Aberdeen Enlightenment. The Arts Curriculum in the Eighteenth Century*.
3. See *The Philosophical Orations of Thomas Reid Delivered at Graduation Ceremonies in King's College, Aberdeen, 1753, 1756, 1759, 1762*, pp. 33–5 (new edition in *Reid and the University*).
4. See Essay V, Chap. 3, note 9, p. 289 below. Concerning the Society, see H. L. Ulman, *The Minutes of the Aberdeen Philosophical Society 1758–1773*.

When Reid left Aberdeen for Glasgow in 1764 it was to succeed Adam Smith in a specialist professorship for moral philosophy, in contrast to the regentship at Aberdeen, which covered nearly the entire arts curriculum. As a consequence, he provided a much more extensive and systematic coverage of the subject, and we are fortunate to have considerable documentary evidence of his teaching. He taught two classes: the 'public' class, which was prescribed by the Arts curriculum, and a more advanced 'private' class. It is the former course that concerns us here. [5] It was divided into pneumatology, ethics and politics. [6] Of these, he considered pneumatology to be the most important, because basic to the rest, so it was allocated the most time – from early October to early March. Ethics ran through the rest of March and April, while politics took up May and probably the first few days of June. In this arrangement pneumatology covered not only the general theory of the mind but also what Reid called 'the theory of morals', which we would call moral psychology and epistemology, and that part of natural theology concerned with the existence and nature of the divine mind. [7] It was the lectures on 'the theory of morals' that eventually were developed to constitute most of the *Active Powers*, namely, Essays I–IV, while Essay V mixes subjects that had been covered in these lectures and in those on practical ethics.

The lectures on 'the theory of morals', which Reid delivered in his first year at Glasgow, 1764–5, can be partly reconstituted from his surviving notes, and there are remnants of later revisions, especially in 1768–9. There is only little material on active power and on will, corresponding to Essays I and II. [8] The bulk of manuscripts that have been preserved present the subjects that eventually were vastly developed to become Essay III and parts of Essays IV and V. [9] Reid's most basic principle of organization was the one we have already encountered: 'We have divided Ethicks or Moral Philosophy into two General Parts a Theoretical & a

5. The substance of the private class, in so far as the records have survived, is presented in *Reid on Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts*.
6. See Reid's Introductory Lecture to his course, in *Practical Ethics*, pp. 3–16.
7. On p. 282 of the *Active Powers*, he suggests that the label 'theory of morals' is improper, but he never hesitated in using it.
8. See 8/III/6, 1–2 (28 December 1768) on deliberation and purpose; 8/III/8, 1–2 (3 January 1769) on instinct, habit, appetites.
9. There is a nearly continuous run of lectures from 28 January to 20 February 1765, with revisions and supplements from 1768–9; see 8/III/3, 1–16, continued 8/III/2, 1–2; insert 8/III/4, 16 on 8/III/3, 13. There are important revisions from 1769 in 8/III/4, 3–12; 8/III/5, 1–2, continued 8/III/4, 14; and 8/III/7, 1–7.

Practical'.[10] He also formulated this with reference to his predecessor in the Glasgow chair, Adam Smith, according to whom moral philosophy's two central questions concern the practical issue of the nature of virtue and the theoretical issue of the principle of the human mind in accordance with which we make moral appraisals.[11] The theoretical part of ethics belonged, as Reid stressed, to pneumatology, the theory of the mind.

Reid thought it a matter of empirical fact that 'practical ethics' in all essentials was universal to humanity, while 'the theory of morals' was a battlefield for factions of philosophers. He often suggested that only the former was of real importance, while he considered the latter as philosophical parlour games. Yet, he also maintained that the philosophical theories of the nature and function of the active powers of the human mind had serious moral implications, a point he was particularly keen to make when faced with what he considered morally corrupting philosophy. The latter line of argument concerning the significance of sound theory in morals certainly carried the day in his actual practice, for it was his anatomy of our active powers that was expanded to great length, not least with a critical mission to refute dangerous rival ideas.

Reid's mature philosophy had first of all been formed through his need to criticize David Hume, but in the latter part of his philosophical career the rebuttal of Joseph Priestley emerges as an equally urgent concern. In many ways the *Active Powers* can be seen as a major effort to combine these two battles. In order to reject Hume's moral theory, Reid had to sort out the nature of moral judgment – 'the rational principles of action' – which again required an analysis of the relationship between these and the non-rational principles of action, the mechanical and animal principles. These arguments were premised upon a notion of 'active power in general' and of 'the will', which ran directly up against necessitarianism.[12] Consequently, Reid had to take on a major and detailed defence of 'the liberty of moral agents'. While this issue had played a role from early in his philosophical development, it evidently took on a completely different magnitude at some time after his move to Glasgow in 1764, and the most obvious way to understand it is as a part of his deepening

10. 8/III/5, 1 (8 February 1769).
11. 8/III/3, 11.
12. Reid strongly preferred to call it fatalism; see his comments on James Gregory's 'Essay on the Difference between the Relation of Motive and Action, and that of Cause and Effect, in Physics: On Physical and Mathematical Principles', in Reid's *Correspondence*, p. 251.

concern with the philosophical materialism and associated necessitarianism that Priestley presented with forceful polemics in the 1770s and onwards.[13]

Priestley published *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated* in 1777 as an 'appendix' to *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit*, with a second edition in 1782. In 1778 Priestley and Richard Price, a friend of Reid's as well as of Priestley's, published *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity*. Both the *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated* and the *Free Discussion* are quoted and discussed in Essay IV. Reid also singles out for criticism the hypothesis of a 'deceitful sense' of freedom made by Henry Home (later Lord Kames) in the first (1751) edition of his *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*. Somewhat surprisingly Reid never mentions the most powerful defence of the doctrine of necessity published in the eighteenth century, the American philosopher Jonathan Edwards's *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame*. However, Reid certainly read the *Inquiry*, for there is a record in the Aberdeen manuscripts of his response to Edwards' main arguments.[14]

In the first instance, Reid dealt with these challenges in a similar way to his early engagement with Hume's epistemology in the Aberdeen Philosophical Society. This time the venue was the Glasgow Literary Society, in which he set about presenting a remarkable series of discourses and discussion questions in the late 1770s. In these papers he laid down most of the arguments that became the central Essay III of the *Active Powers*, as well as papers preparatory to other parts of the work.[15]

13. For the significance to Reid's development of his metaphysical battles with Priestley, see the material in *Reid on the Animate Creation* with Paul Wood's Introduction.
14. See 3/II/6.
15. Details of these papers and the preserved manuscripts are given in notes to each of the chapters. The records of the Glasgow Literary Society are incomplete, and virtually nothing is known of the Society's meetings from 1771 to 1776. Reid was undoubtedly active during those years, but in December1776 he is listed for a title – 'Of active power' – which suggests that he was then at an early, perhaps the first, stage of the long sequence of connected papers that we have in mind. A year later he had got to the will; and after yet another year, he was clearly into the principles of action. Sources for the Society's records are: Glasgow University Library MS Murray 505; Glasgow University Library MS Gen 4 'Minutes of

The next major step towards the *Active Powers* seems to have been prompted by a more surprising factor than unacceptable philosophical publications and to have been channelled into literary composition rather than oral presentation. Among the Reid papers held at the Aberdeen University Library is the following transcription:

> Haarlem Nov‹embe›r 1 1780
> Teyler's Theological Society
> At the last Meeting of the Members of the Society, it was resolved that the following Question be proposed to the Publick
> 'Wherein consists Mans reasonable Liberty; and how is it most clearly Demonstrable, that we are free Acting Beings
> The Members of this Society wish the Answers given to the above Question, may be treated Logically, not in a Controversial Form; they likewise desire each Writer would confine himself to his own Idea of Mans reasonable Liberty; and from thence demonstrate, that Man is a free acting Being, without endeavouring to refute those who, on different Principles, have assigned the Bounds to Mans reasonable Liberty. It is apprehended by this Means, the Treatises will be more compendious, and if any Material Difference of Opinion should appear; the Society will be better able to publish that Difference for the Satisfaction of all enquiring Lovers of Truth.
> The Honourary Prize that shall be adjudged to the best Answer is a Gold Medal, value four hundred Guilders, exclusive of the Workmanship.
> Answers to be directed to the foundation House of the late Mr Peter Teyler van der Hulst at Haarlem, before the first of Dec‹embe›r 1781; as the Society will adjudge the Prize by the 8 Aprile 1782.
> The Treatises must be written in a legible hand, either in Dutch Latin French, or English, sealed & signed with a Motto; with which must be sent a separate Paper, containing the Authors Name & Address Sealed with the same Seal & superscribed with the same Motto. Further the Society abide by the Conditions published by them in 1778; which of

the College Literary Society, 1790–99'; National Library of Scotland, MS 3114 'Records of the Literary Society of Glasgow, 1764–79. Transcribed from the Society's Minutes [by William James Duncan], 1830'; manuscript book of minutes in the Royal Faculty of Procurators of Glasgow; and *Notices and Documents Illustrative of the Literary History of Glasgow, during the Greater Part of the Last Century*, ed. W. J. Duncan, Maitland Club no. 14, Glasgow 1831, pp. 15–16, 132–5.

Enchide and Rosch Booksellers, at Haarlem, and in the Monthly Review of January 1779.'[16]

Teyler's Theological Society (Teylers Godgeleerd Genootschap) was founded in Harlem in The Netherlands in 1778 on the basis of a bequest in the will of a banker named Pieter Teylor. The Society sponsored an annual essay prize, which was advertised internationally. A published flier of the same format as Reid's note has been preserved for the competition in 1794 and the questions were also advertised in British periodicals. Presumably, Reid copied from such an announcement. We know that the best essays entered for a competition were published on a number of occasions.[17]

There is no evidence to suggest that Reid actually entered the competition, but the Aberdeen collection of Reid manuscripts contains a number of what appear to be drafts of an entry. There are three sets of papers which are headed with the question asked by Teyler's Theological Society in 1780, 'Wherein consists man's reasonable liberty; and how is it most clearly demonstrable, that we are free acting beings?'[18] The basic structure of Essay IV is discernible in these papers. A definition is given of human freedom. Reasons are given to show that the belief that we are 'free acting Beings' counts as a natural conviction, in the sense of being a belief that is so universal as plainly to be 'the result of our Constitution, & the work of him that made us'.[19] The two other arguments of Essay IV, from belief in moral accountability and from belief that purposive action is also free action, are also sketched. Replies are given to various kinds of objection to liberty as Reid has defined it, with special attention given to the question of the influence of motives on action, since, as Reid puts it, 'The modern Advocates for Necessity lay the Stress of their Cause upon the Influence of Motives'.[20] The distinctive feature of Reid's treatment of the question of moral liberty is obvious in all these papers: that is to say, there is no attempt on Reid's part to do anything more than, first, estab-

16. See 6/I/15.
17. See Anon., *Verbandingenraakende den Naturalyken en Geopenbaarden Goasdienst* [*Prize Dissertations on Natural and Revealed Religion*], 1781; Robert Courthope Sims, *An Essay on the Nature and Constitution of Man*, 1793; Cæsar Morgan, *A Demonstration that True Philosophy has no Tendency to undermine Divine Revelation*, 1787; William Laurence Brown, *An Essay on the Folly of Scepticism*, 1788; same, *An Essay on the natural Equality of Men*, 1793.
18. 2/I/14, 2/II/9 and 2/II/15. For further details, see Essay IV, Chap. 1, note 1.
19. 2/II/9, p. 25.
20. 2/II/9, p. 13.

lish that belief in a freedom incompatible with necessity is a natural belief, and, second, show the groundlessness of the stock objections to the truth of the belief. In line with Reid's general approach to the basic principles of cognition and action, no attempt is made directly to prove the belief to be true.

Reid saw contemporary moral sentimentalism, associationism and necessitarianism as the direct extensions of ancient Epicureanism and its revival in the seventeenth century. This is prominent as an organizing theme in his lectures, and it maintains a significant presence in the *Active Powers*. His polemics against Epicureanism, ancient and modern, more than anything else, makes clear the moralizing and 'practical' mission of the supposedly theoretical part of his ethics. The meaning and tenability of Reid's distinction between theoretical and practical ethics is an issue that is put into further relief by the fact that he very clearly mixed elements of his avowedly practical ethics into his theoretical analysis of the active powers in Essay V. The first three chapters of this Essay echo his lectures more clearly than perhaps any other part of the book. They are concerned with 'practical ethics' as an account of the duties and virtues that make up the moral life, and Chapter 2 in particular is important as Reid's most precise characterization of practical ethics as a purely taxonomical, as distinct from explanatory, discipline.[21] At the end of that chapter he distinguishes with great sharpness between practical and theoretical ethics, but he does so by making the point that we can and do practise moral living without knowing anything about the theory of the moral powers of the mind. He does not turn the question around and ask whether moral theorizing is morally neutral. As we have mentioned, he clearly did not think so, and the four long chapters that make up the rest of Essay V employ some of Reid's sharpest theoretical tools in a polemic against Hume, which above all is meant to make a moral point. As he himself points out, this material 'was wrote long ago, and read in a literary society', namely, the Aberdeen Philosophical Society, before he moved to Glasgow in 1764. However, there is good reason to believe that it was revised, greatly expanded and, at least in part, presented also in the Glasgow Literary Society in later years. What is more, these final chapters in the *Active Powers* made considerable use of Reid's lectures on jurisprudence which formed the core of his course in practical ethics.

21. See K. Haakonssen, 'Natural Jurisprudence and the Identity of the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Religion and Philosophy in Enlightenment Britain*.

In other words, the formation of Essay V's Chapters 4–7 is a far more complex matter than might be assumed from Reid's remark about their origins. It is also a matter that is peculiarly difficult to deal with. Not only is there nothing like the substantial sequence of Society papers from the years preceding the published work that we have for Essays III and IV; there is no preserved final manuscript for Essay V. This contrasts with the four preceding Essays.

After his retirement from teaching in 1780, Reid began to prepare his extensive material for publication. We have a first reference to what his friend Lord Kames called his 'magnum opus' in 1781, and in the following years leading up to the publication of the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* in 1785 Reid's work is the subject of several of the surviving letters. It is from his correspondence with James Gregory that we learn that Reid's original plan of presenting the whole of his philosophy of the human mind, both intellectual and active powers, in one work was changed only very late. In March 1784, he wrote to Gregory:

> I send you now the remainder of what I propose to print with respect to the Intellectual Powers of the Mind. It may, perhaps, be a year before what relates to the Active Powers be ready, and, therefore, I think the former might be published by itself, as it is very uncertain whether I shall live to publish the latter.[22]

At the end of that year, he was speculating: 'Perhaps if the publication [of the *Intellectual Powers*] be delayed to 1786, I might have my Essays on the Active Powers ready.'[23] As it turned out, the *Intellectual Powers* appeared in the summer of 1785, when we find Reid explaining that 'I have wrote a chapter lately upon the causes of [the] ambiguity' of the word *cause*, i.e. Essay IV, Chap. 3, of the *Active Powers*. By March 1786, Reid is clearly giving himself more time with the writing:

> I wish, if I find health and leisure, in summer, to add some essays to go before that on liberty, in order to give some farther elucidation to the principles of morals, both theoretical and practical.[24]

22. *Correspondence*, p. 166, letter No. 86, 14 March 1784.
23. *Correspondence*, p. 173, letter No. 91, 31 December 1784, to James Gregory.
24. *Correspondence*, p. 180, letter No. 96, March 1786, to James Gregory.

Assuming that Reid is using the word 'essays' loosely, he is most likely referring to the final four chapters of Essay III, Part III, for which we do not find substantial Society papers similar to those for the rest of Parts III and IV. Then in the summer of 1787, he is discussing proof sheets and the length of the final manuscript with his publisher.[25]

We should mention one more step on the way to publication. Reid sought comments on his manuscript of the *Active Powers*, as he had for that of the *Intellectual Powers*, from his two closest protégés, James Gregory and Dugald Stewart, the former professor of medicine, the latter professor of moral philosophy in the University of Edinburgh. Both evidently complied, as we see from Reid's correspondence and from his characteristically generous dedication of the first volume, the *Intellectual Powers*, to the two younger men, who also helped see the two volumes through the press. We have identified the final manuscript for all but Essay V of the *Active Powers* and with it we have found what appear to be Dugald Stewart's fairly extensive comments.[26] From this we can see that it was a finalized text that Reid had sent to Stewart, who offered mainly stylistic and idiomatic suggestions, most of which Reid adopted.[27] We do not have a similar document from Gregory, but Reid thanks him for his comments, and there is a considerable amount of directly relevant philosophical discussion in his and Reid's correspondence and in Reid's extensive comments on Gregory's work.[28]

Thomas Reid's *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* was published in Edinburgh and London by, respectively, John Bell and George Robinson in early 1788. Bell and Robinson had published the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* three years earlier. The *Active Powers* appeared in quarto, 493 pages long, priced at 18 shillings in boards, and 1 pound 1 shilling bound. Bell and Robinson were relative newcomers as pub -

25. *Correspondence*, p. 187, letter No. 100, 11 July 1787, to John Bell.
26. Stewart's suggestions are kept with the relevant sections of Reid's final manuscript, and the correlation is as follows:
    Essay I: 1/II/6, 79–81
    Essay II to Essay III. 2, Chap. 2 in the middle: 1/II/1, 77–9
    Essay III. 2, Chap. 2 in the middle to Chap. 8: 1/II/2, 75–7
    Essay III. 3, Chap. 1 to Essay IV, Chap. 1: 1/II/3, 77–8
    Essay IV, Chaps. 3–5 and 9–11: 1/II/4, 81–3
27. We have recorded a few more substantial suggestions; see pp. 95, 101, 135 and 199 below.
28. For Reid's appreciation, see *Correspondence*, p. 180, letter No. 96, March 1786. We have referred to the correspondence where relevant to specific parts of the *Active Powers*.

lishers of the authors of the Scottish Enlightenment. Reid's *Intellectual Powers* had been their first major venture in the publication of Scottish philosophy, and had been a success from the point of view of both publishers and author. Immediately upon the appearance of the *Active Powers*, Reid was writing to Bell about a second edition of the two volumes of *Essays* as one work, apparently implying that there was an agreement about this. The author also wished the publisher 'a quick sale', but that did not seem to materialize. [29] In May 1788 Robinson wrote to Bell reassuring him that 'The Sale mends and no doubt in time it will sell very well'. [30] It appears that the business did pick up, for by June 1796 Reid could thank Bell for a new edition of what was clearly the *Intellectual Powers*, and in the same letter he promised to send Bell the corrected version of the *Active Powers*.[31] There is no trace of either of these publications, and we do not believe that they appeared at the time. Reid died in October of that year, and it seems reasonable to speculate that he never did send the corrected manuscript of the *Active Powers*. We may further speculate – and in the absence of evidence it can be no more – that the publisher sat on the new edition of the *Intellectual Powers* until 1803 when the two works of *Essays* were finally united as one work, the *Active Powers* being added as a third volume. By that time, Dugald Stewart had written his 'Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid' and delivered it as a memorial address to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1802. It was therefore available for inclusion as a significant preface in the new edition of Reid's major work, which Stewart saw through the press. This three-volume set was published in Edinburgh by Bell and Bradfute and in London by G. and J. Robinson under the title *Essays on the Powers of the Human Mind*. In the meantime a Dublin publisher had put the two sets of *Essays* together in three octavo volumes in 1790, and a Philadelphia publisher had done likewise in 1793. The 1803 edition with Stewart's 'Life of the Author' was reprinted in various formats during the first decades of the nineteenth century. It was super-

29. Reid wrote to Bell on 21 February 1788 acknowledging receipt of 'a list of the copies of my Essays sent in presents by my order': *Correspondence*, pp. 195–6. In the same letter Reid asks Bell to be sure to send a copy to 'the Rev Dr Richard Price at Hackney'.
30. Quoted in Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America*, p. 394.
31. *Correspondence*, p. 236.

seded in 1846 by Sir William Hamilton's *The Works of Thomas Reid, D.D.*[32] The present volume is the first new edition of the *Active Powers* since Hamilton's.[33]

There is a curious uncertainty about the titles of the two volumes of Essays. The first explicit proposal for a title occurs in a letter to James Gregory in 1784, where Reid says, 'I think the title may be, Essays on the Intellectual Powers of the Human Mind'.[34] Yet when that work appeared, 'the Human Mind' had become 'Man'. In the preserved manuscripts of both volumes, Reid uses 'the Human Mind', but when the present work appeared in print, it had 'Man' on the title-page but 'the Human Mind' on page 1 above the Introduction. In the 1803 edition, which brought the two works together, and which, as mentioned, was seen through the press by Stewart, the title was 'the Human Mind'. Sir William Hamilton split the difference and made the intellectual powers of 'man' and the active powers of 'the human mind'.

Essays on the Active Powers of Man was reviewed in the major journals of the day soon after its publication. Reviews were published in *The Analytical Review*, *The English Review* and *The Critical Review* in 1788 and in *The Monthly Review* in 1790.[35] These reviews are all lengthy, but, as was usual in the eighteenth century, they are mostly taken up with summaries of Reid's arguments and extensive quotation. They are all anonymous, but we know that the very positive four-part review in *The Analytical Review* was written by the medical doctor and Glasgow graduate James Currie.[36] They are respectful and complimentary in tone, even where the reviewer disagrees with Reid. Taken together, these reviews illustrate the extent to which the philosophy of the human mind was dominated at the end of the eighteenth century by disagreement between Reid's style of philosophizing on the one hand and Priestley's on the other. As the reviewer in *The Analytical Review* has it:

32. *The Works of Thomas Reid, D.D. Now fully collected, with selections from his unpublished letters. Preface, notes and supplementary dissertations by Sir William Hamilton, Bart.*
33. The MIT Press edition of 1969 is a facsimile reprint of an American *Works of Thomas Reid* published in 1813–15.
34. *Correspondence*, p. 166; letter No. 86, 14 March 1784, Reid to Gregory.
35. Transcriptions of these reviews are printed in *Scottish Common Sense Philosophy: Sources and Origins*, ed. James Fieser, vol. 4, pp. 524–94.
36. See William Wallace Currie, *Memoir of the Life, Writings and Correspondence of James Currie*, vol. 2, p. 237.

> The Essays of Dr. Reid on the Intellectual and Active Powers of Man, being the result of upwards of thirty years reflection on the subject, by a mind of eminent candour and deep penetration, are entitled to great attention and to high praise. Nevertheless his doctrines have met with rather a rough reception in several quarters, and the principles on which they are founded have been condemned by many empty declaimers, who did not comprehend them. Nor has this conduct been confined to the vain and frivolous. A philosopher of the first order has attacked the doctrines of our author with a vehemence approaching to personal hostility, and Dr. Reid stands foremost in the list of the *three Scotch Doctors* who are arraigned for *bold and insolent innovation*, by the greatest and most successful *innovator* of the present age.[37]

Priestley's *An Examination of Dr. Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind, Dr. Beattie's Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, and Dr. Oswald's Appeal to Common Sense* had been published in 1774. It was undoubtedly a vehement attack on the incipient 'Scottish school', and it contributed not a little to the idea that the three thinkers did indeed form a 'school'. Priestley never engaged with the *Active Powers* itself, but through the late 1780s and 1790s books and essays were published restating the case for 'philosophical necessity' as it had been defined by Priestley, by, among others, Alexander Crombie, William Belsham and William Godwin.[38]

Reid's position, in turn, had its defenders as well. In 1792 James Gregory published his *Philosophical and Literary Essays* and dedicated it to Reid.[39] Reid commented at considerable length on this work both in a pre-publication printing in 1789 and in the published form.[40] Gregory's work featured a novel 'proof' of what he considered the absurdity of necessitarianism drawn from the science of forces. In general, Reid was not shy of offering forthright criticism of his friends' works, so it is striking that he only advised Gregory 'to express less confidence in your mathematical reasonings'.[41]

Two significant publications reformulated Reid's position in rather less idiosyncratic terms. The first was James Beattie's *Elements of Moral*

37. *Scottish Common Sense Philosophy*, ed. Fieser, vol. 4, p. 550.
38. See James A. Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy*, ch. 9.
39. Two volumes, Edinburgh 1792.
40. See *Correspondence*, pp. 205–8, letter No. 111; and Appendix A. pp. 241–59.
41. *Correspondence*, p. 252.

Science, published in two instalments: Volume I in 1790 and Volume II in 1793. Chapter II of Volume I, entitled 'Active Powers', appears to owe much to Reid's approach to the question of human freedom: a footnote to the title of Section II, 'Further Remarks on the Will', refers the reader to 'Dr Reid's essays on the active powers of man', and the same note is appended to the definition of principles of action given in Section III.[42] Like Reid, Beattie took Priestley to be the most significant proponent of the doctrine of necessity. Victor Cousin was not unfair when, commenting on the *Elements* as a whole, he remarked that Beattie 'suit Reid et le développe avec éloquence, mais sans y ajouter des vues nouvelles'.[43]

Relations between Reid and Beattie were at times strained. Dugald Stewart, on the other hand, was the second of the dedicatees of *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, and in 1728 published his own version of the Reidian philosophy of moral agency in *The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man*. This was the last work of Stewart's published in his lifetime. Unlike in the case of Beattie's *Elements*, the differences between Stewart's book and Reid's *Active Powers* are significant and interesting. Especially remarkable, perhaps, is the confidence Stewart had in the ability of 'the evidence of consciousness' to settle the question between necessitarians and defenders of freedom of will. 'It may ... be regarded as one great step gained in this controversy,' Stewart wrote, 'if it may henceforth be assumed as a principle agreed upon by both parties, that this is the only question which can be philosophically stated on the subject.'[44] What Stewart meant is that this is the only question which is of relevance to a scientific treatment of human freedom. While Reid might not have wanted to put things quite that boldly, Stewart's claim is a reminder of the importance of what Reid termed 'the way of reflection' to the philosophical method that both men employed,[45] and this in turn is a reminder that while Reid undoubtedly has much to offer philosophers

42. James Beattie, *Elements of Moral Science*, 2 vols., Edinburgh 1790–3, vol. 1, pp. 214, 220.
43. 'Beattie follows Reid and develops his ideas with eloquence but without adding anything new': quoted in Pierre Moreau, *L'Oeuvre de James Beattie: tradition et perspectives nouvelles*, p. 3.
44. Dugald Stewart, *The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man*, vol. 2, p. 508n.
45. See the Conclusion to Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, where he singles out Descartes as the thinker who broke with all previous philosophy's 'way of analogy' and entered, albeit uncertainly, upon the modern 'way of reflection', pp. 203–5.

of the twenty-first century, he was a man of his time in failing to perceive any important difference between, as we would say now, the questions of psychology and the questions of philosophy.

He was also very much of his time in a different sense. Although we do not know much about his reception among general readers, there is evidence that the *Active Powers* joined his earlier works, the *Inquiry* and the *Intellectual Powers*, as a widely available and significant title in Scotland's intellectual culture far beyond the walls of the universities and the urban centres.[46] It is somewhat surprising to see a work of such length and difficulty appearing in the catalogues of no fewer than twenty-one subscription libraries across Scotland in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and that it and Reid's other works were among the dozen most frequently acquired works of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy. [47] It is likewise striking that the *Active Powers* was among such works studied as part of a gentlewoman's life-long self-education, while she presided over the running of her family's landed estate.[48]

46. See David Allan, *Making British Culture: English Readers and the Scottish Enlightenment, 1740–1830*, pp. 79–80.
47. See Mark Towsey, '"All partners may be enlightened and improved by reading them": The distribution of Enlightenment Books in Scottish Subscription Library Catalogues, 1750–*c*. 1820', especially pp. 33–4.
48. See Mark Towsey, '"An infant son to truth engage": Virtue, Responsibility and Self-improvement in the Reading of Elizabeth Rose of Kilravock, 1747–1815', pp. 72, 84.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

This edition is based on the first edition of 1788. We have collated three copies of the first edition and have found no variants among them:

Aberdeen University Library (Special Libraries): MH 1925 E (TL sigma 34)
British Library: 527.I.8
St Andrews University Library (Special Collections): sB1533.A2A1D88

We have also collated the present text with that in volume 3 of the 1803 edition of *Essays on the Powers of the Human Mind*. There are no substantial variants, but the later edition capitalizes certain words that are not so printed in the first edition, especially, 'Nature', 'First Cause', 'Supreme' and 'Him', when referring to God. We have no reason to think that Reid had anything to do with these changes and have not recorded them.

As mentioned above, the manuscript for Essays I–IV has been preserved. The correlation between the parts of the published work and the manuscript numbers is shown below:

First edition/manuscripts

Introduction	1/II/6, 11–13
Essay I	1/II/6, 14–73
Essay II, Chap. 1	1/II/6, 74–8 and 1/II/1, 1–3
Chaps. 2–4	1/II/1, 4–34
Essay III, Part 1	1/II/1, 35–61
Part 2, Chaps. 1–2	1/II/1, 62–76 and 1/II/2, 1–7
Chaps. 3–8	1/II/2, 8–76
Part 3	1/II/3, 1–63
Essay IV, Chaps. 1–2	1/II/3, 65–76
Chaps. 3–11	1/II/4, 1–80 (and indicated insertions)

There are at least twenty-five typical printer's marks in these papers, most of them indicating breaks between gatherings and line-breaks. All of these are accurately reflected in the printed text, and we must therefore

assume that the manuscript established above is the one from which Essays I–IV of the *Active Powers* were printed. The first edition has been collated with these manuscripts. The printed text varies in the conventions of punctuation, capitalization and the spelling of certain words. We judge that these changes fell within the authority of the printer, as was commonly the case at the time, and we have not recorded them. We have, however, noted a few cases that are not simply standardizations of the kind indicated.[49]

As outlined earlier, there is a considerable manuscript background to the final manuscript and the published text of the *Active Powers*. This material is part of the very extensive collection of Reid papers preserved in the Aberdeen University Library. We have made extensive use of these papers in preparing the present edition in the following ways. First of all, we have found a great deal of information to elucidate the text in our annotations. As was common in the eighteenth-century works, Reid was sparing in naming authors and texts which he referred to, but in his manuscripts, especially in his lectures, he was often more explicit. We have therefore been able to find considerable evidence from his own hand in our task of assisting a readership that no longer shares his literary assumptions. Secondly, we have referred to a great deal of the manuscripts relevant to individual parts of the work, thus enabling the interested reader to explore this background to the text. However, it is of importance to understand that, while we have been generous in these references, we do not and cannot claim to have been exhaustive of the possibilities in the Reid papers. The archives comprise more than 500 separately numbered manuscripts, many of them running to considerable length. What is more, with the passage of time, a great many of the papers have become separated from their original context, so that the catalogue ordering bears only limited relevance to the actual content. Thirdly, any systematic correlation of the papers with the published work is made difficult by the fact that Reid, as was common, wrote on almost any piece of blank paper. So material was scattered already by himself, and notes on moral philosophy may turn up on a funeral announcement or on spare pages in manuscripts otherwise devoted to scientific topics. Last, but not least, the use of manuscripts in understanding a work that has been clearly determined by the author is a task for each reader. As editors, we have aimed no higher than to be suggestive, hoping to encourage the reader to

49. See pp. 75, 216, 223 and 256 below.

explore the Reid papers independently. This is now made possible for anyone interested through online access to nearly all the Reid manuscripts in the Aberdeen University Library: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/historic/Thomas_Reid/. This comprises the Birkwood Collection and a smaller separate series of papers (3061/1–26).

MODE OF REFERENCE

Manuscripts

All manuscript references are to documents in the Special Collections of Aberdeen University. By far most of the manuscripts used here are in the Birkwood Collection. In such references, the first four digits, 2131, have been dropped, so that 2131/8/III/3 becomes 8/III/3, followed, where relevant, by the number of the manuscript page(s) referred to. Other manuscript numbers are given in full.

Published works

Works are generally cited with shortened titles, while full bibliographical details are given in the Bibliography. References to Hume's *Treatise* cite Book, Part, Section, Paragraph according to the edition by D. F. and M. J. Norton, followed by the page number(s) of the edition by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch. References to Hume's *Enquiries* cite Part, Section, Paragraph according to the editions by T. L. Beauchamp, followed by the page number(s) of the edition by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch.

CRITICAL TEXT

ESSAYS

ON THE

ACTIVE POWERS

OF MAN.

By THOMAS REID, D.D. F.R.S.EDIN.
PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW.

He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good. MICAH.[1]

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED FOR JOHN BELL, PARLIAMENT-SQUARE,
AND G. G. J. & J. ROBINSON, LONDON.

M,DCC,LXXXVIII.

1. Micah 6:8.

CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION, 5

ESSAY I. OF ACTIVE POWER IN GENERAL.

CHAP. 1. *Of the Notion of Active Power*, 7
--- 2. *The same Subject*, 13
--- 3. *Of* MR LOCKE'S *Account of our Idea of Power*, 20
--- 4. *Of* MR HUME'S *Opinion of the Idea of Power*, 22
--- 5. *Whether Beings that have no Will nor Understanding may have Active Power?* 27
--- 6. *Of the efficient Causes of the Phænomena of Nature*, 33
--- 7. *Of the Extent of Human Power*, 38

ESSAY II. OF THE WILL.

CHAP. 1. *Observations concerning the Will*, 46
--- 2. *Of the Influence of Incitements and Motives upon the Will*, 51
--- 3. *Of Operations of Mind which may be called Voluntary*, 59
--- 4. *Corollaries*, 70

ESSAY III. OF THE PRINCIPLES OF ACTION.

PART I. *Of the Mechanical Principles of Action.*

CHAP. 1. *Of the Principles of Action in general*, 74
--- 2. *Instinct*, 78
--- 3. *Of Habit*, 88

ESSAY III. PART II.

Of Animal Principles of Action.

Page

CHAP. 1. *Of Appetites*, 92
--- 2. *Of Desires*, 99
--- 3. *Of Benevolent Affection in general*, 106
--- 4. *Of the particular Benevolent Affections*, 111
--- 5. *Of Malevolent Affection*, 124
--- 6. *Of Passion*, 133

--- 7. *Of Disposition*, 142
--- 8. *Of Opinion*, 146

ESSAY III. PART III.

Of the Rational Principles of Action.

CHAP. 1. *There are Rational Principles of Action in Man*, 152
--- 2. *Of Regard to our Good on the Whole*, 154
--- 3. *The Tendency of this Principle*, 159
--- 4. *Defects of this Principle*, 164
--- 5. *Of the Notion of Duty, Rectitude, moral Obligation*, 168
--- 6. *Of the Sense of Duty*, 174
--- 7. *Of moral Approbation and Disapprobation*, 180
--- 8. *Observations concerning Conscience*, 186

ESSAY IV. OF THE LIBERTY OF MORAL AGENTS.

CHAP. 1. *The Notions of Moral Liberty and Necessity stated*, 196
--- 2. *Of the Words Cause and Effect, Action, and Active Power*, 202
--- 3. *Causes of the Ambiguity of those Words*, 206
--- 4. *Of the Influence of Motives*, 213
--- 5. *Liberty consistent with Government*, 221
--- 6. *First Argument for Liberty*, 228
--- 7. *Second Argument*, 236
--- 8. *Third Argument*, 240
--- 9. *Of Arguments for Necessity*, 243
--- 10. *The same Subject*, 253
--- 11. *Of the Permission of Evil*, 259

ESSAY V. OF MORALS.

CHAP. 1. *Of the First Principles of Morals*, 270
--- 2. *Of Systems of Morals*, 278
--- 3. *Of Systems of Natural Jurisprudence*, 283
--- 4. *Whether an Action deserving Moral Approbation, must be done with the Belief of its being morally good*, 290
--- 5. *Whether Justice be a Natural or an Artificial Virtue*, 301
--- 6. *Of the Nature and Obligation of a Contract*, 327
--- 7. *That Moral Approbation implies a real Judgment*, 344

ESSAYS

ON THE

ACTIVE POWERS OF THE HUMAN MIND.[1]

INTRODUCTION.

THE division of the faculties of the human mind into *Understanding* and *Will* is very ancient, and has been very generally adopted; the former comprehending all our speculative, the latter all our active Powers.

It is evidently the intention of our Maker, that man should be an active and not merely a speculative being. For this purpose, certain active powers have been given him, limited indeed in many respects, but suited to his rank and place in the creation.

Our business is to manage these powers, by proposing to ourselves the best ends, planning the most proper system of conduct that is in our power, and executing it with industry and zeal. This is true wisdom; this is the very intention of our being.

Every thing virtuous and praise-worthy must lie in the right use of our power; every thing vicious and blameable in the abuse of it. What is not within the sphere of our power cannot be imputed to us either for blame or praise. These are self-evident ‹2› truths, to which every unprejudiced mind yields an immediate and invincible assent.

Knowledge derives its value from this, that it enlarges our power, and directs us in the application of it. For in the right employment of our active power consists all the honour, dignity and worth of a man, and, in the abuse and perversion of it, all vice, corruption and depravity.

We are distinguished from the brute-animals, not less by our active than by our speculative powers.

The brutes are stimulated to various actions by their instincts, by their appetites, by their passions. But they seem to be necessarily determined by the strongest impulse, without any capacity of self-government. Therefore we do not blame them for what they do; nor have we any reason to think that they blame themselves. They may be trained up by

1. Concerning changes in the work's title, see the Editors' Introduction p. xix.

discipline, but cannot be governed by law. There is no evidence that they have the conception of a law, or of its obligation.

Man is capable of acting from motives of a higher nature. He perceives a dignity and worth in one course of conduct, a demerit and turpitude in another, which brutes have not the capacity to discern.

He perceives it to be his duty to act the worthy and the honourable part, whether his appetites and passions incite him to it, or to the contrary. When he sacrifices the gratification of the strongest appetites or passions to duty, this is so far from diminishing the merit of his conduct, that it greatly increases it, and affords, upon reflection, an inward satisfaction and triumph, of which brute-animals are not susceptible. When he acts a contrary part, he has a consciousness of demerit, to which they are no less strangers.

‹3› Since, therefore, the active powers of man make so important a part of his constitution, and distinguish him so eminently from his fellow-animals, they deserve no less to be the subject of philosophical disquisition than his intellectual powers.

A just knowledge of our powers, whether intellectual or active, is so far of real importance to us, as it aids us in the exercise of them. And every man must acknowledge, that to act properly is much more valuable than to think justly or reason acutely.

‹5›

ESSAY I.

OF ACTIVE POWER IN GENERAL.[1]

CHAP. I.

Of the Notion of Active Power.

To consider gravely what is meant by Active Power, may seem altogether unnecessary, and to be mere trifling. It is not a term of art, but a common word in our language, used every day in discourse, even by the vulgar. We find words of the same meaning in all other languages; and there is no reason to think that it is not perfectly understood by all men who understand the English language.

I believe all this is true, and that an attempt to explain a word so well understood, and to show that it has a meaning, requires an apology.

The apology is, That this term, so well understood by the vulgar, has been darkened by philosophers, who, in this as in many other instances, have found great difficulties about a thing which, to the rest of mankind, seems perfectly clear.

This has been the more easily effected, because Power is a thing so much of its own kind, and so simple in its nature, as not to admit of a logical definition.

It is well known, that there are many things perfectly understood, and of which we have clear and distinct conceptions, ‹6› which cannot be logically defined. No man ever attempted to define magnitude; yet there is no word whose meaning is more distinctly or more generally understood. We cannot give a logical definition of thought, of duration, of number, or of motion.

When men attempt to define such things, they give no light. They may give a synonymous word or phrase, but it will probably be a worse for a

1. For the earliest preserved notes by Reid on this general topic and on will, see 6/I/34–5, dated 1736. He is recorded as giving a discourse ‘Of active power’, to the Glasgow Literary Society on 6 December 1776. At the end of his career is an important paper delivered to the Society on 13 March 1792, ‘On Power’ (2/II/2). For a modernized transcription of the last, see *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid* , eds. J. Haldane and S. Read, pp. 14–23. See also 2/I/14.

better. If they will define, the definition will either be grounded upon a hypothesis, or it will darken the subject rather than throw light upon it.

The Aristotelian definition of motion, that it is '*Actus entis in potentia, quatenus in potentia*,' has been justly censured by modern Philosophers;[2] yet I think it is matched by what a celebrated modern Philosopher has given us, as the most accurate definition of belief, to wit, 'That it is a lively idea related to or associated with a present impression.'*Treatise of Human Nature*, *vol.* i. *p.* 172.[3] 'Memory,' according to the same Philosopher, 'is the faculty by which we repeat our impressions, so as that they retain a considerable degree of their first vivacity, and are somewhat intermediate betwixt an idea and an impression.'[4]

EUCLID, if his editors have not done him injustice, has attempted to define a right line, to define unity, ratio and number. But these definitions are good for nothing. We may indeed suspect them not to be E UCLID's; because they are never once quoted in the Elements, and are of no use.[5]

I shall not therefore attempt to define active power, that I may not be liable to the same censure; but shall offer some observations that may lead us to attend to the conception we have of it in our own minds.

1. Power is not an object of any of our external senses, nor even an object of consciousness.

‹7› That it is not seen, nor heard, nor touched, nor tasted, nor smelt, needs no proof. That we are not conscious of it, in the proper sense of that word, will be no less evident, if we reflect, that consciousness is that power of the mind by which it has an immediate knowledge of its own operations. Power is not an operation of the mind, and therefore no object of consciousness. Indeed every operation of the mind is the exertion of some power of the mind; but we are conscious of the operation only, the power lies behind the scene; and though we may justly infer the power from the operation, it must be remembered that inferring is not the province of consciousness, but of reason.

I acknowledge, therefore, that our having any conception or idea of power is repugnant to Mr LOCKE's theory, that all our simple ideas are got

2. Transl. 'The act of a being in potency insofar as it is in potency.' Locke is one modern philosopher who censured this definition of motion: see *Essay*, III.iv.8: pp. 422–3.
3. Hume, *Treatise*, 1.3.7.5: SBN 93.
4. Hume, *Treatise*, 1.1.3.1: SBN 8. Reid has altered the word order of the original, but without altering the sense.
5. For this controversy, see Correspondence, p. 25; letter No. 18, 1763 (Reid to William Ogilvie).

either by the external senses, or by consciousness. [6] Both cannot be true. Mr HUME perceived this repugnancy, and consistently maintained, that we have no idea of power. [7] Mr LOCKE did not perceive it. If he had, it might have led him to suspect his theory; for when theory is repugnant to fact, it is easy to see which ought to yield. I am conscious that I have a *conception* or *idea* of power, but, strictly speaking, I am not conscious that I have *power*.

I shall have occasion to shew, that we have very early, from our constitution, a conviction or belief of some degree of active power in ourselves. This belief, however, is not consciousness: For we may be deceived in it; but the testimony of consciousness can never deceive. Thus, a man who is struck with a palsy in the night commonly knows not that he has lost the power of speech till he attempts to speak; he knows not whether he can move his hands and arms till he makes the trial; and if, without making trial, he consults his consciousness ever so attentively, it will give him no information whether he has lost these powers, or still retains them.

‹8› From this we must conclude, that the powers we have are not an object of consciousness, though it would be foolish to censure this way of speaking in popular discourse, which requires not accurate attention to the different provinces of our various faculties. The testimony of consciousness is always unerring, nor was it ever called in question by the greatest sceptics, ancient or modern.

2. A *second* observation is, That as there are some things of which we have a direct, and others of which we have only a relative conception, power belongs to the latter class.

As this distinction is overlooked by most writers in logic, I shall beg leave to illustrate it a little, and then shall apply it to the present subject.

Of some things we know what they are in themselves; our conception of such things I call *direct.* Of other things, we know not what they are in themselves, but only that they have certain properties or attributes, or certain relations to other things; of these our conception is only *relative.*

To illustrate this by some examples: In the university-library, I call for the book, press[8] L, shelf 10. No. 10.; the library-keeper must have such a

6. See *Essay*, II.i.2–5: pp. 104–6.
7. See especially *Treatise*, 1.3.14 (‘Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion’) and *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Section 7 (also entitled ‘Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion’).
8. Here, a bookcase.

conception of the book I want, as to be able to distinguish it from ten thousand that are under his care. But what conception does he form of it from my words? They inform him neither of the author, nor the subject, nor the language, nor the size, nor the binding, but only of its mark and place. His conception of it is merely relative to these circumstances; yet this relative notion enables him to distinguish it from every other book in the library.

There are other relative notions that are not taken from accidental relations, as in the example just now mentioned, but from qualities or attributes essential to the thing.

‹9› Of this kind are our notions both of body and mind. What is body? It is, say Philosophers, that which is extended, solid and divisible. Says the querist, I do not ask what the properties of body are, but what is the thing itself; let me first know directly what body is, and then consider its properties? To this demand I am afraid the querist will meet with no satisfactory answer; because our notion of body is not direct but relative to its qualities. We know that it is something extended, solid and divisible, and we know no more.

Again, if it should be asked, What is mind? It is that which thinks. I ask not what it does, or what its operations are, but what it is? To this I can find no answer; our notion of mind being not direct, but relative to its operations, as our notion of body is relative to its qualities.

There are even many of the qualities of body, of which we have only a relative conception. What is heat in a body? It is a quality which affects the sense of touch in a certain way. If you want to know, not how it affects the sense of touch, but what it is in itself; this I confess I know not. My conception of it is not direct, but relative to the effect it has upon bodies. The notions we have of all those qualities which Mr Locke calls secondary, and of those he calls powers of bodies, such as the power of the magnet to attract iron, or of fire to burn wood, are relative.[9]

Having given examples of things of which our conception is only relative, it may be proper to mention some of which it is direct. Of this kind, are all the primary qualities of body; figure, extension, solidity, hardness, fluidity, and the like. Of these we have a direct and immediate knowledge from our senses. To this class belong also all the operations of mind of which we are conscious. I know what thought is, what memory, what a purpose, what a promise.

9. See *Essay*, I.ii.22–6: pp. 140–3.

‹10› There are some things of which we can have both a direct and a relative conception. I can directly conceive ten thousand men or ten thousand pounds, because both are objects of sense, and may be seen. But whether I see such an object, or directly conceive it, my notion of it is indistinct; it is only that of a great multitude of men, or of a great heap of money; and a small addition or diminution makes no perceptible change in the notion I form in this way. But I can form a relative notion of the same number of men or of pounds, by attending to the relations which this number has to other numbers, greater or less. Then I perceive that the relative notion is distinct and scientific. For the addition of a single man, or a single pound, or even of a penny, is easily perceived.

In like manner, I can form a direct notion of a polygon of a thousand equal sides and equal angles. This direct notion cannot be more distinct, when conceived in the mind, than that which I get by sight, when the object is before me, and I find it so indistinct, that it has the same appearance to my eye, or to my direct conception, as a polygon of a thousand and one, or of nine hundred and ninety-nine sides. But when I form a relative conception of it, by attending to the relation it bears to polygons of a greater or less number of sides, my notion of it becomes distinct and scientific, and I can demonstrate the properties by which it is distinguished from all other polygons. From these instances it appears, that our relative conceptions of things are not always less distinct, nor less fit materials for accurate reasoning, than those that are direct; and that the contrary may happen in a remarkable degree.

Our conception of power is relative to its exertions or effects. Power is one thing; its exertion is another thing. It is true, there can be no exertion without power; but there may be power that is not exerted. Thus a man may have power to speak when he is silent; he may have power to rise and walk when he sits still.

‹11› But though it be one thing to speak, and another to have the power of speaking, I apprehend we conceive of the power as something which has a certain relation to the effect. And of every power we form our notion by the effect which it is able to produce.

3. It is evident that power is a quality, and cannot exist without a subject to which it belongs.

That power may exist without any being or subject to which that power may be attributed, is an absurdity, shocking to every man of common understanding.

It is a quality which may be varied, not only in degree, but also in kind; and we distinguish both the kinds and degrees by the effects which they are able to produce.

Thus a power to fly, and a power to reason, are different kinds of power, their effects being different in kind. But a power to carry one hundred weight, and a power to carry two hundred, are different degrees of the same kind.

4. We cannot conclude the want of power from its not being exerted; nor from the exertion of a less degree of power, can we conclude that there is no greater degree in the subject. Thus, though a man on a particular occasion said nothing, we cannot conclude from that circumstance, that he had not the power of speech; nor from a man's carrying ten pound weight, can we conclude that he had not power to carry twenty.

5. There are some qualities that have a contrary, others that have not; power is a quality of the latter kind.

Vice is contrary to virtue, misery to happiness, hatred to love, negation to affirmation; but there is no contrary to power. Weak‹12›ness or impotence are defects or privations of power, but not contraries to it.

If what has been said of power be easily understood, and readily assented to, by all who understand our language, as I believe it is, we may from this justly conclude, That we have a distinct notion of power, and may reason about it with understanding, though we can give no logical definition of it.

If power were a thing of which we have no idea, as some Philosophers have taken much pains to prove, that is, if power were a word without any meaning, we could neither affirm nor deny any thing concerning it with understanding. We should have equal reason to say that it is a substance, as that it is a quality; that it does not admit of degrees as that it does. If the understanding immediately assents to one of these assertions, and revolts from the contrary, we may conclude with certainty, that we put some meaning upon the word*power*, that is, that we have some idea of it. And it is chiefly for the sake of this conclusion, that I have enumerated so many obvious things concerning it.

The term active power is used, I conceive, to distinguish it from speculative powers. As all languages distinguish action from speculation, the same distinction is applied to the powers by which they are produced. The powers of seeing, hearing, remembering, distinguishing, judging, reasoning, are speculative powers; the power of executing any work of art or labour is active power.

There are many things related to power, in such a manner, that we can have no notion of them if we have none of power.

The exertion of active power we call *action*; and as every action produces some change, so every change must be caused by ‹13› some exertion, or by the cessation of some exertion of power. That which produces a change by the exertion of its power, we call the *cause* of that change; and the change produced, the *effect* of that cause.

When one being, by its active power, produces any change upon another, the last is said to be *passive*, or to be acted upon. Thus we see that action and passion, cause and effect, exertion and operation, have such a relation to active power, that if it be understood, they are understood of consequence; but if power be a word without any meaning, all those words which are related to it, must be words without any meaning. They are, however, common words in our language; and equivalent words have always been common in all languages.

It would be very strange indeed, if mankind had always used these words so familiarly, without perceiving that they had no meaning; and that this discovery should have been first made by a Philosopher of the present age.

With equal reason it might be maintained, that though there are words in all languages to express sight, and words to signify the various colours which are objects of sight; yet that all mankind from the beginning of the world had been blind, and never had an idea of sight or of colour. But there are no absurdities so gross as those which Philosophers have advanced concerning ideas.

CHAP. II.

The same Subject.

THERE are, I believe, no abstract notions, that are to be found more early, or more universally, in the minds of men, than those of acting, and being acted upon. Every child that ‹14› understands the distinction between striking and being struck, must have the conception of action and passion.

We find accordingly, that there is no language so imperfect, but that it has active and passive verbs, and participles; the one signifying some kind of action; the other the being acted upon. This distinction enters into the original contexture of all languages.

Active verbs have a form and construction proper to themselves;

passive verbs a different form and a different construction. In all languages, the nominative to an active verb is the agent; the thing acted upon is put in an oblique case. In passive verbs, the thing acted upon is the nominative, and the agent, if expressed, must be in an oblique case; as in this example:*Raphael drew the Cartoons; the Cartoons were drawn by Raphael.*

Every distinction which we find in the structure of all languages, must have been familiar to those who framed the languages at first, and to all who speak them with understanding.

It may be objected to this argument, taken from the structure of language, in the use of active and passive verbs, that active verbs are not always used to denote an action, nor is the nominative before an active verb, conceived in all cases to be an agent, in the strict sense of that word; that there are many passive verbs which have an active signification, and active verbs which have a passive. From these facts, it may be thought a just conclusion, that in contriving the different forms of active and passive verbs, and their different construction, men have not been governed by a regard to any distinction between action and passion, but by chance, or some accidental cause.

In answer to this objection, the fact on which it is founded, ‹15› must be admitted; but I think the conclusion not justly drawn from it, for the following reasons:

1. It seems contrary to reason, to attribute to chance or accident, what is subject to rules, even though there may be exceptions to the rule. The exceptions may, in such a case, be attributed to accident, but the rule cannot. There is perhaps hardly any thing in language, so general, as not to admit of exceptions. It cannot be denied to be a general rule, that verbs and participles have an active and a passive voice; and as this is a general rule, not in one language only, but in all the languages we are acquainted with, it shews evidently that men, in the earliest stages, and in all periods of society, have distinguished action from passion.

2. It is to be observed, that the forms of language are often applied to purposes different from those for which they were originally intended. The varieties of a language, even the most perfect, can never be made equal to all the variety of human conceptions. The forms and modifications of language must be confined within certain limits, that they may not exceed the capacity of human memory. Therefore, in all languages, there must be a kind of frugality used, to make one form of expression serve many different purposes, like Sir Hudibras' dagger, which, though

made to stab or break a head, was put to many other uses. [10] Many examples might be produced of this frugality in language. Thus the Latins and Greeks had five or six cases of nouns, to express the various relations that one thing could bear to another. The genitive case must have been at first intended to express some one capital relation, such as that of possession or of property; but it would be very difficult to enumerate all the relations which, in the progress of language, it was used to express. The same observation may be applied to other cases of nouns.

‹16› The slightest similitude or analogy is thought sufficient to justify the extension of a form of speech beyond its proper meaning, whenever the language does not afford a more proper form. In the moods of verbs, a few of those which occur most frequently are distinguished by different forms, and these are made to supply all the forms that are wanting. The same observation may be applied to what is called the *voices* of verbs. An active and a passive are the capital ones; some languages have more, but no language so many as to answer to all the variations of human thought. We cannot always coin new ones, and therefore must use some one or other of those that are to be found in the language, though at first intended for another purpose.

3. A third observation in answer to the objection is, That we can point out a cause of the frequent misapplication of active verbs, to things which have no proper activity: A cause which extends to the greater part of such misapplications, and which confirms the account I have given of the proper intention of active and passive verbs.

As there is no principle, that appears to be more universally acknowledged by mankind, from the first dawn of reason, than, that every change we observe in nature must have a cause; so this is no sooner perceived, than there arises in the human mind, a strong desire to know the causes of those changes that fall within our observation. *Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*, is the voice of nature in all men. [11] Nor is there any thing that more early distinguishes the rational from the brute creation, than this avidity to know the causes of things, of which I see no sign in brute-animals.

10. Reid refers to the mock-epic poem *Hudibras* by Samuel Butler (1612–80), written to satirize the Puritans and their cause. The hero, Hudibras, has a sword, which in turn has a dagger as its page, which 'When it had stabb'd, or broke a head, / It would scrape trenchers, or chip bread': *Hudibras*, Part 1, Canto 1, ll. 380–1.

11. 'Fortunate is he who can understand the causes of things': Virgil, *Georgics*, Book II, l. 490.

It must surely be admitted, that in those periods wherein languages are formed, men are but poorly furnished for carrying on this investigation with success. We see, that the experience of thousands of years is necessary to bring men into the right track ‹17› in this investigation, if indeed they can yet be said to be brought into it. What innumerable errors rude ages must fall into, with regard to causes, from impatience to judge, and inability to judge right, we may conjecture from reason, and may see from experience; from which I think, it is evident, that supposing active verbs to have been originally intended to express what is properly called action, and their nominatives to express the agent; yet, in the rude and barbarous state wherein languages are formed, there must be innumerable mis - applications of such verbs and nominatives, and many things spoken of as active, which have no real activity.

To this we may add, that it is a general prejudice of our early years, and of rude nations, when we perceive anything to be changed, and do not perceive any other thing which we can believe to be the cause of that change, to impute it to the thing itself, and conceive it to be active and animated, so far as to have the power of producing that change in itself. Hence, to a child, or to a savage, all nature seems to be animated; the sea, the earth, the air, the sun, moon, and stars, rivers, fountains and groves, are conceived to be active and animated beings. As this is a sentiment natural to man in his rude state, it has, on that account, even in polished nations, the verisimilitude that is required in poetical fiction and fable, and makes personification one of the most agreeable figures in poetry and eloquence.

The origin of this prejudice probably is, that we judge of other things by ourselves, and therefore are disposed to ascribe to them that life and activity which we know to be in ourselves.

A little girl ascribes to her doll, the passions and sentiments she feels in herself. Even brutes seem to have something of this nature. A young cat, when she sees any brisk motion in a feather or a straw, is prompted, by natural instinct, to hunt it as she would hunt a mouse.

‹18› Whatever be the origin of this prejudice in mankind, it has a powerful influence upon language, and leads men, in the structure of language, to ascribe action to many things that are merely passive; because, when such forms of speech were invented, those things were really believed to be active. Thus we say, the wind blows, the sea rages, the sun rises and sets, bodies gravitate and move.

When experience discovers that these things are altogether inactive, it

is easy to correct our opinion about them; but it is not so easy to alter the established forms of language. The most perfect and the most polished languages are like old furniture, which is never perfectly suited to the present taste, but retains something of the fashion of the times when it was made.

Thus, though all men of knowledge believe, that the succession of day and night is owing to the rotation of the earth round its axis, and not to any diurnal motion of the heavens; yet we find ourselves under a necessity of speaking in the old style, of the sun's rising and going down, and coming to the meridian. And this style is used, not only in conversing with the vulgar, but when men of knowledge converse with one another. And if we should suppose the vulgar to be at last so far enlightened, as to have the same belief with the learned, of the cause of day and night, the same style would still be used.

From this instance we may learn, that the language of mankind may furnish good evidence of opinions which have been early and universally entertained, and that the forms contrived for expressing such opinions, may remain in use after the opinions which gave rise to them have been greatly changed.

Active verbs appear plainly to have been first contrived to express action. They are still in general applied to this purpose. And though we find many instances of the application of active ‹19› verbs to things which we now believe not to be active, this ought to be ascribed to mens having once had the belief that those things are active, and perhaps, in some cases, to this, that forms of expression are commonly extended, in course of time, beyond their original intention, either from analogy, or because more proper forms for the purpose are not found in language.

Even the misapplication of this notion of action and active power shews that there is such a notion in the human mind, and shews the necessity there is in philosophy of distinguishing the proper application of these words, from the vague and improper application of them, founded on common language, or on popular prejudice.

Another argument to shew that all men have a notion or idea of active power is, that there are many operations of mind common to all men who have reason, and necessary in the ordinary conduct of life, which imply a belief of active power in ourselves and in others.

All our volitions and efforts to act, all our deliberations, our purposes and promises, imply a belief of active power in ourselves; our counsels, exhortations and commands, imply a belief of active power in those to

whom they are addressed.

If a man should make an effort to fly to the moon; if he should even deliberate about it, or resolve to do it, we should conclude him to be lunatic; and even lunacy would not account for his conduct, unless it made him believe the thing to be in his power.

If a man promises to pay me a sum of money to-morrow, without believing that it will then be in his power, he is not an honest man; and, if I did not believe that it will then be in his power, I should have no dependence on his promise.

‹20› All our power is, without doubt, derived from the Author of our being, and, as he gave it freely, he may take it away when he will. No man can be certain of the continuance of any of his powers of body or mind for a moment; and,therefore, in every promise, there is a condition understood, to wit, if we live, if we retain that health of body and soundness of mind which is necessary to the performance, and if nothing happen, in the providence of GOD, which puts it out of our power. The rudest savages are taught by nature to admit these conditions in all promises, whether they be expressed or not; and no man is charged with breach of promise, when he fails through the failure of these conditions.

It is evident, therefore, that, without the belief of some active power, no honest man would make a promise, no wise man would trust to a promise; and it is no less evident, that the belief of active power, in ourselves or in others, implies an idea or notion of active power.

The same reasoning may be applied to every instance wherein we give counsel to others, wherein we persuade or command. As long, therefore, as mankind are beings who can deliberate and resolve and will, as long as they can give counsel, and exhort, and command, they must believe the existence of active power in themselves, and in others, and therefore must have a notion or idea of active power.

It might farther be observed, that power is the proper and immediate object of ambition, one of the most universal passions of the human mind, and that which makes the greatest figure in the history of all ages. Whether Mr HUME, in defence of his system, would maintain that there is no such passion in mankind as ambition, or that ambition is not a vehement desire of power, or that men may have a vehement desire of power, without having any idea of power, I will not pretend to divine.[12]

12. Hume includes ambition among the indirect passions, but makes no connection between it and the idea of power: see especially *Treatise* 2.2.5, ‘Of our esteem for the rich and powerful’.

‹21› I cannot help repeating my apology for insisting so long in the refutation of so great an absurdity. It is a capital doctrine in a late celebrated system of human nature, that we have no idea of power, not even in the Deity; that we are not able to discover a single instance of it, either in body or spirit, either in superior or inferior natures; and that we deceive ourselves when we imagine that we are possessed of any idea of this kind.

To support this important doctrine, and the out-works that are raised in its defence, a great part of the first volume of the Treatise of Human Nature is employed. That system abounds with conclusions the most absurd that ever were advanced by any Philosopher, deduced with great acuteness and ingenuity from principles commonly received by Philosophers. To reject such conclusions as unworthy of a hearing, would be disrespectful to the ingenious author; and to refute them is difficult, and appears ridiculous.

It is difficult, because we can hardly find principles to reason from, more evident than those we wish to prove; and it appears ridiculous, because, as this author justly observes, next to the ridicule of denying an evident truth, is that of taking much pains to prove it.[13]

Protestants complain, with justice, of the hardship put upon them by Roman Catholics, in requiring them to prove that bread and wine is not flesh and blood. They have, however, submitted to this hardship for the sake of truth. I think it is no less hard to be put to prove that men have an idea of power.

What convinces myself that I have an idea of power is, that I am conscious that I know what I mean by that word, and, while I have this consciousness, I disdain equally to hear arguments for or against my having such an idea. But if we would convince those, who, being led away by prejudice, or by autho ‹22›rity, deny that they have any such idea, we must condescend to use such arguments as the subject will afford, and such as we should use with a man who should deny that mankind have any idea of magnitude or of equality.

The arguments I have adduced are taken from these five topics: 1. That there are many things that we can affirm or deny concerning power, with understanding. 2. That there are, in all languages, words signifying, not only power, but signifying many other things that imply power, such

13. See *Treatise*, 1.3.16.1: SBN 176. Hume makes this remark while arguing ‘that beasts are endow’d with thought and reason as well as men’.

as, action and passion, cause and effect, energy, operation, and others. 3. That in the structure of all languages, there is an active and passive form in verbs and participles, and a different construction adapted to these forms, of which diversity no account can be given, but that it has been intended to distinguish action from passion. 4. That there are many operations of the human mind familiar to every man come to the use of reason, and necessary in the ordinary conduct of life, which imply a conviction of some degree of power in ourselves and in others. 5. That the desire of power is one of the strongest passions of human nature.

CHAP. III.

Of Mr. LOCKE'S *Account of our Idea of Power.*

THIS author, having refuted the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas, took up, perhaps too rashly, an opinion that all our simple ideas are got, either by sensation or by reflection; that is, by our external senses, or by consciousness of the operations of our own minds.[14]

Through the whole of his Essay, he shews a fatherly affection to this opinion, and often strains very hard to reduce our simple ideas to one of those sources, or both. Of this, several ‹23› instances might be given, in his account of our idea of substance, of duration, of personal identity. Omitting these, as foreign to the present subject, I shall only take notice of the account he gives of our idea of power.[15]

The sum of it is, That observing, by our senses, various changes in objects, we collect a possibility in one object to be changed, and in another a possibility of making that change, and so come by that idea which we call power.

Thus we say the fire has a power to melt gold, and gold has power to be melted; the first he calls active, the second passive power.

He thinks, however, that we have the most distinct notion of active power, by attending to the power which we ourselves exert, in giving motion to our bodies when at rest, or in directing our thoughts to this or the other object as we will. And this way of forming the idea of power he attributes to reflection, as he refers the former to sensation.

On this account of the origin of our idea of power, I would beg leave

14. See *Essay*, II.i.2–5: pp. 104–6.
15. See *Essay*, II.xxi.1–5: pp. 233–6.

to make two remarks, with the respect that is most justly due to so great a Philosopher, and so good a man.

1. Whereas he distinguishes power into *active* and *passive*, I conceive passive power is no power at all. He means by it, the possibility of being changed. To call this *power*, seems to be a misapplication of the word. I do not remember to have met with the phrase *passive power* in any other good author. Mr LOCKE seems to have been unlucky in inventing it; and it deserves not to be retained in our language.

Perhaps he was unwarily led into it, as an opposite to active power. But I conceive we call certain powers *active*, to distin‹24›guish them from other powers that are called *speculative*. As all mankind distinguish action from speculation, it is very proper to distinguish the powers by which those different operations are performed, into active and speculative. Mr LOCKE indeed acknowledges that active power is more properly called power; but I see no propriety at all in passive power; it is a powerless power, and a contradiction in terms.

2. I would observe, that Mr LOCKE seems to have imposed upon himself, in attempting to reconcile this account of the idea of power to his favourite doctrine, That all our simple ideas are ideas of sensation, or of reflection.

There are two steps, according to his account, which the mind takes, in forming this idea of power; *first*, It observes changes in things; and, *secondly*, From these changes, it infers a cause of them, and a power to produce them.

If both these steps are operations of the external senses, or of consciousness, then the idea of power may be called an idea of sensation, or of reflection. But, if either of those steps requires the co-operation of other powers of the mind, it will follow, that the idea of power cannot be got by sensation, nor by reflection, nor by both together. Let us, therefore, consider each of these steps by itself.

First, We observe various changes in things. And Mr LOCKE takes it for granted, that changes in external things are observed by our senses, and that changes in our thoughts are observed by consciousness.

I grant that it may be said, that changes in things are observed by our senses, when we do not mean to exclude every other faculty from a share in this operation. And it would be ridiculous to censure the phrase, when it is so used in popular discourse.

‹25› But it is necessary to Mr LOCKE's purpose, that changes in external things should be observed by the senses alone, excluding every

other faculty; because every faculty that is necessary in order to observe the change, will claim a share in the origin of the idea of power.

Now, it is evident, that memory is no less necessary than the senses, in order to our observing changes in external things, and therefore the idea of power, derived from the changes observed, may as justly be ascribed to memory as to the senses.

Every change supposes two states of the thing changed. Both these states may be past; one of them at least must be past; and one only can be present. By our senses we may observe the present state of the thing; but memory must supply us with the past; and, unless we remember the past state, we can perceive no change.

The same observation may be applied to consciousness. The truth, therefore, is, that, by the senses alone, without memory, or by consciousness alone, without memory, no change can be observed. Every idea, therefore, that is derived from observing changes in things, must have its origin, partly from memory, and not from the senses alone, nor from consciousness alone, nor from both together.

The *second* step made by the mind in forming this idea of power is this: From the changes observed we collect a cause of those changes, and a power to produce them.

Here one might ask Mr LOCKE, whether it is by our senses that we draw this conclusion, or is it by consciousness? Is reasoning the province of the senses, or is it the province of consciousness? If the senses can draw one conclusion from premises, ‹26› they may draw five hundred, and demonstrate the whole elements of EUCLID.

Thus, I think, it appears, that the account which Mr LOCKE himself gives of the origin of our idea of power, cannot be reconciled to his favourite doctrine, That all our simple ideas have their origin from sensation or reflection; and that, in attempting to derive the idea of power from these two sources only, he unawares brings in our memory, and our reasoning power, for a share in its origin.

CHAP. IV.

Of Mr HUME'S *Opinion of the Idea of Power.*

THIS very ingenious author adopts the principle of Mr LOCKE before mentioned, That all our simple ideas are derived either from sensation or reflection. This he seems to understand, even in a stricter sense than Mr

LOCKE did. For he will have all our simple ideas to be copies of preceeding impressions, either of our external senses or of consciousness. 'After the most accurate examination,' says he, 'of which I am capable, I venture to affirm, that the rule here holds without any exception, and that every simple idea has a simple impression which resembles it, and every simple impression a correspondent idea. Every one may satisfy himself in this point, by running over as many as he pleases.'[16]

I observe here, by the way, that this conclusion is formed by the author rashly and unphilosophically. For it is a conclusion that admits of no proof, but by induction; and it is upon this ground that he himself founds it. The induction cannot be perfect till every simple idea that can enter into the human mind be examined, and be shewn to be copied from a resembling im‹27›pression of sense or of consciousness. No man can pretend to have made this examination of all our simple ideas without exception; and, therefore, no man can, consistently with the rules of philosophising, assure us, that this conclusion holds without any exception.

The author professes, in his title-page, to introduce into moral subjects the experimental method of reasoning. This was a very laudable attempt; but he ought to have known, that it is a rule in the experimental method of reasoning, That conclusions established by induction ought never to exclude exceptions, if any such should afterwards appear from observation or experiment. Sir I SAAC NEWTON, speaking of such conclusions, says, 'Et si quando in experiundo postea reperiatur aliquid, quod a parte contraria faciat; tum demum, non sine istis exceptionibus affirmetur conclusio opportebit.'[17] 'But,' says our author, 'I will venture to affirm, that the rule here holds without any exception.'

Accordingly, throughout the whole treatise, this general rule is considered as of sufficient authority, in itself, to exclude, even from a hearing, every thing that appears to be an exception to it. This is contrary to the fundamental principles of the experimental method of reasoning, and therefore may be called rash and unphilosophical.

Having thus established this general principle, the author does great

16. *Treatise*, 1.1.1.5: SBN 3–4. Reid omits two sentences, without changing the sense.
17. Newton, *Optice*, p. 413 (Book 3, Part 1). Newton's original English is as follows: 'But if at any time afterwards any Exception shall occur from Experiments, it may then begin to be pronounced with such Exceptions as occur' (*Opticks*, p. 380).

execution by it among our ideas. He finds, that we have no idea of substance, material or spiritual; that body and mind are only certain trains of related impressions and ideas; that we have no idea of space or duration, and no idea of power, active or intellective.

Mr LOCKE used his principle of sensation and reflection with greater moderation and mercy. Being unwilling to thrust the ‹28› ideas we have mentioned into the *limbo* of non-existence, he stretches sensation and reflection to the very utmost, in order to receive these ideas within the pale; and draws them into it, as it were by violence.

But this author, instead of shewing them any favour, seems fond to get rid of them.

Of the ideas mentioned, it is only that of power that concerns our present subject. And, with regard to this, the author boldly affirms, ‘That we never have any idea of power; that we deceive ourselves when we imagine we are possessed of any idea of this kind.’[18]

He begins with observing, ‘That the terms *efficacy, agency, power, force, energy*, are all nearly synonymous; and therefore it is an absurdity to employ any of them in defining the rest. By this observation,’ says he, ‘we reject at once all the vulgar definitions which Philosophers have given of *power* and *efficacy*.’[19]

Surely this author was not ignorant, that there are many things of which we have a clear and distinct conception, which are so simple in their nature, that they cannot be defined any other way than by synonymous words. It is true that this is not a logical definition, but that there is, as he affirms, an absurdity in using it, when no better can be had, I cannot perceive.

He might here have applied to *power* and *efficacy* what he says, in another place, of *pride* and *humility*. ‘The passions of *pride* and *humility*,’ he says, ‘being simple and uniform impressions, it is impossible we can ever give a just definition of them. As the words are of general use, and the things they represent the most common of any, every one, of

18. Reid paraphrases Hume here, drawing most obviously on the following passage: ‘If we have really an idea of power, we may attribute power to an unknown quality: But as ‘tis impossible, that that idea can be deriv’d from such a quality, and as there is nothing in known qualities, which can produce it; it follows that we deceive ourselves, when we imagine we are possest of any idea of this kind, after the manner we commonly understand it’ (*Treatise*, 1.3.14.11: SBN 161).
19. *Treatise*, 1.3.14.4: SBN 157. Hume includes ‘necessity’, ‘connexion’ and ‘productive quality’ in his list of near-synonyms.

himself, ‹29› will be able to form a just notion of them without danger of mistake.'[20]

He mentions Mr LOCKE's account of the idea of power, That, observing various changes in things, we conclude, that there must be somewhere a power capable of producing them, and so arrive at last, by this reasoning, at the idea of power and efficacy.

'But,' says he, 'to be satisfied that this explication is more popular than philosophical, we need but reflect on two very obvious principles; *first*, That reason alone can never give rise to any original idea; and, *secondly*, That reason, as distinguished from experience, can never make us conclude, that a cause, or productive quality, is absolutely requisite to every beginning of existence.'[21]

Before we consider the two principles which our author opposes to the popular opinion of Mr LOCKE, I observe,

First, That there are some *popular* opinions, which, on that very account, deserve more regard from Philosophers, than this author is willing to bestow.

That things cannot begin to exist, nor undergo any change, without a cause that hath power to produce that change, is indeed so popular an opinion, that, I believe, this author is the first of mankind that ever called it in question. It is so popular, that there is not a man of common prudence who does not act from this opinion, and rely upon it every day of his life. And any man who should conduct himself by the contrary opinion, would soon be confined as insane, and continue in that state, till a sufficient cause was found for his enlargement.

Such a popular opinion as this, stands upon a higher author‹30›ty than that of philosophy, and philosophy must strike sail to it, if she would not render herself contemptible to every man of common understanding.

For though, in matters of deep speculation, the multitude must be guided by Philosophers, yet, in things that are within the reach of every man's understanding, and upon which the whole conduct of human life turns, the Philosopher must follow the multitude, or make himself perfectly ridiculous.

Secondly, I observe, that whether this popular opinion be true of false, it follows from mens having this opinion, that they have an idea of power. A false opinion about power, no less than a true, implies an idea of power;

20. *Treatise*, 2.1.2.1: SBN 277. Reid omits some of the original passage without changing the sense.
21. *Treatise*, 1.3.14.5: SBN 157.

for how can men have any opinion, true or false, about a thing of which they have no idea?

The *first* of the very obvious principles which the author opposes to Mr LOCKE's account of the idea of power, is, That reason alone can never give rise to any original idea.

This appears to me so far from being a very obvious principle, that the contrary is very obvious.

Is it not our reasoning faculty that gives rise to the idea of reasoning itself? As our idea of sight takes its rise from our being endowed with that faculty; so does our idea of reasoning. Do not the ideas of demonstration, of probability, our ideas of a syllogism, of major, minor and conclusion, of an enthymeme, dilemma, sorites, and all the various modes of reasoning, take their rise from the faculty of reason? Or is it possible, that a being, not endowed with the faculty of reasoning, should have these ideas? This principle, therefore, is so far from being obviously true, that it appears to be obviously false.

‹31› The *second* obvious principle is, That reason, as distinguished from experience, can never make us conclude, that a cause, or productive quality, is absolutely requisite to every beginning of existence.

In some Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man, I had occasion to treat of this principle, That every change in nature must have a cause; and, to prevent repetition, I beg leave to refer the reader to what is said upon this subject, *Essay* VI. *chap*. 6.[22] I endeavoured to shew that it is a first principle, evident to all men come to years of understanding. Besides its having been universally received, without the least doubt, from the beginning of the world, it has this sure mark of a first principle, that the belief of it is absolutely necessary in the ordinary affairs of life, and, without it, no man could act with common prudence, or avoid the imputation of insanity. Yet a Philosopher, who acted upon the firm belief of it every day of his life, thinks fit, in his closet, to call it in question.

He insinuates here, that we may know it from experience. I endeavoured to shew, that we do not learn it from experience, for two reasons.

First, Because it is a necessary truth, and has always been received as a necessary truth. Experience gives no information of what is necessary, or of what must be.

We may know from experience, what is, or what was, and from that may probably conclude what shall be in like circumstances; but, with

22. See Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, pp. 497–503.

regard to what must necessarily be, experience is perfectly silent.

Thus we know, by unvaried experience, from the beginning of the world, that the sun and stars rise in the east and set in the west. But no man believes, that it could not possibly have been‹32› otherwise, or that it did not depend upon the will and power of him who made the world, whether the earth should revolve to the east or to the west.

In like manner, if we had experience, ever so constant, that every change in nature we have observed, actually had a cause, this might afford ground to believe, that, for the future, it shall be so; but no ground at all to believe that it must be so, and cannot be otherwise.

Another reason to shew that this principle is not learned from experience is, That experience does not shew us a cause of one in a hundred of those changes which we observe, and therefore can never teach us that there must be a cause of all.

Of all the paradoxes this author has advanced, there is not one more shocking to the human understanding than this, That things may begin to exist without a cause. This would put an end to all speculation, as well as to all the business of life. The employment of speculative men, since the beginning of the world, has been to investigate the causes of things. What pity is it, they never thought of putting the previous question, Whether things have a cause or not? This question has at last been started; and what is there so ridiculous as not to be maintained by some Philosopher?

Enough has been said upon it, and more, I think, than it deserves. But, being about to treat of the active powers of the human mind, I thought it improper to take no notice of what has been said by so celebrated a Philosopher, to shew, that there is not, in the human mind, any idea of power.

‹33›

CHAP. V.

Whether Beings that have no Will nor Understanding may have Active Power?[23]

THAT active power is an attribute, which cannot exist but in some being possessed of that power, and the subject of that attribute, I take for

23. Reid discussed the topic of this chapter at the Glasgow Literary Society on 7 November 1777 under the title, ‘Have we any reason to ascribe active power to beings not endowed with understanding and will?’ Cf. *Correspondence*, p. 97.

granted as a self-evident truth. Whether there can be active power in a subject which has no thought, no understanding, no will, is not so evident.

The ambiguity of the words *power*, *cause*, *agent*, and of all the words related to these, tends to perplex this question. The weakness of human understanding, which gives us only an indirect and relative conception of power, contributes to darken our reasoning, and should make us cautious and modest in our determinations.

We can derive little light in this matter from the events which we observe in the course of nature. We perceive changes innumerable in things without us. We know that those changes must be produced by the active power of some agent; but we neither perceive the agent nor the power, but the change only. Whether the things be active, or merely passive, is not easily discovered. And though it may be an object of curiosity to the speculative few, it does not greatly concern the many.

To know the event and the circumstances that attended it, and to know in what circumstances like events may be expected, may be of con - sequence in the conduct of life; but to know the real efficient, whether it be matter or mind, whether of a superior or inferior order, concerns us little.

‹34› Thus it is with regard to all the effects we ascribe to nature.

Nature is the name which we give to the efficient cause of innumerable effects which fall daily under our observation. But if it be asked what nature is? Whether the first universal cause, or a subordinate one, whether one or many, whether intelligent or unintelligent? Upon these points we find various conjectures and theories, but no solid ground upon which we can rest. And I apprehend the wisest men are they who are sensible that they know nothing of the matter.

From the course of events in the natural world, we have sufficient reason to conclude the existence of an eternal intelligent First Cause. But whether he acts immediately in the production of those events, or by subordinate intelligent agents, or by instruments that are unintelligent, and what the number, the nature, and the different offices of those agents or instruments may be; these I apprehend to be mysteries placed beyond the limits of human knowledge. We see an established order in the succession of natural events, but we see not the bond that connects them together.

Since we derive so little light, with regard to efficient causes and their active power, from attention to the natural world, let us next attend to the

moral, I mean, to human actions and conduct.

Mr LOCKE observes very justly, 'That, from the observation of the operation of bodies by our senses, we have but a very imperfect obscure idea of active power, since they afford us not any idea in themselves of the power to begin any action, either of motion or thought.' He adds, 'That we find in ourselves a power to begin or forbear, continue or end several actions of our minds and motions of our bodies, barely by a ‹35› thought or preference of the mind, ordering, or, as it were, commanding the doing or not doing such a particular action. This power which the mind has thus to order the consideration of any idea, or the forbearing to consider it, or to prefer the motion of any part of the body to its rest, and *vice versa*, in any particular instance, is that which we call *the will*. The actual exercise of that power, by directing any particular action, or its forbearance, is that which we call *volition* or *willing*.'[24]

According to Mr LOCKE, therefore, the only clear notion or idea we have of active power, is taken from the power which we find in ourselves to give certain motions to our bodies, or a certain direction to our thoughts; and this power in ourselves can be brought into action only by willing or volition.

From this, I think, it follows, that, if we had not will, and that degree of understanding which will necessarily implies, we could exert no active power, and consequently could have none: For power that cannot be exerted is no power. It follows also, that the active power, of which only we can have any distinct conception, can be only in beings that have understanding and will.

Power to produce any effect implies power not to produce it. We can conceive no way in which power may be determined to one of these rather than the other, in a being that has no will.

Whatever is the effect of active power must be something that is contingent. Contingent existence is that which depended upon the power and will of its cause. Opposed to this, is necessary existence, which we ascribe to the Supreme Being, because his existence is not owing to the power of any being. The same distinction there is between contingent and necessary truths.

‹36› That the planets of our system go round the sun from west to east, is a contingent truth; because it depended upon the power and will of him who made the planetary system, and gave motion to it. That a circle and

24. *Essay*, II.xxi.4–5: pp. 235–6; there are minor inaccuracies in Reid's transcription.

a right line can cut one another only in two points, is a truth which depends upon no power nor will, and therefore is called necessary and immutable. Contingency, therefore, has a relation to active power, as all active power is exerted in contingent events; and as such events can have no existence, but by the exertion of active power.

When I observe a plant growing from its seed to maturity, I know that there must be a cause that has power to produce this effect. But I see neither the cause nor the manner of its operation.

But in certain motions of my body and directions of my thought, I know, not only that there must be a cause that has power to produce these effects, but that I am that cause; and I am conscious of what I do in order to the production of them.

From the consciousness of our own activity, seems to be derived, not only the clearest, but the only conception we can form of activity, or the exertion of active power.

As I am unable to form a notion of any intellectual power different in kind from those I possess, the same holds with respect to active power. If all men had been blind, we should have had no conception of the power of seeing, nor any name for it in language. If man had not the powers of abstraction and reasoning, we could not have had any conception of these operations. In like manner, if he had not some degree of active power, and if he were not conscious of the exertion of it in his voluntary actions, it is probable he could have no conception of activity, or of active power.

‹37› A train of events following one another ever so regularly, could never lead us to the notion of a cause, if we had not, from our constitution, a conviction of the necessity of a cause to every event.

And of the manner in which a cause may exert its active power, we can have no conception, but from consciousness of the manner in which our own active power is exerted.

With regard to the operations of nature, it is sufficient for us to know, that, whatever the agents may be, whatever the manner of their operation, or the extent of their power, they depend upon the first cause, and are under his control; and this indeed is all that we know; beyond this we are left in darkness. But, in what regards human actions, we have a more immediate concern.

It is of the highest importance to us, as moral and accountable creatures, to know what actions are in our power, because it is for these only that we can be accountable to our Maker, or to our fellow-men in society; by these only we can merit praise or blame; in these only all our

prudence, wisdom and virtue must be employed; and, therefore, with regard to them, the wise Author of nature has not left us in the dark.

Every man is led by nature to attribute to himself the free determinations of his own will, and to believe those events to be in his power which depend upon his will. On the other hand, it is self-evident, that nothing is in our power that is not subject to our will.

We grow from childhood to manhood, we digest our food, our blood circulates, our heart and arteries beat, we are sometimes sick and sometimes in health; all these things must be done by the power of some agent; but they are not done by ‹38› our power. How do we know this? Because they are not subject to our will. This is the infallible criterion by which we distinguish what is our doing from what is not; what is in our power from what is not.

Human power, therefore, can only be exerted by will, and we are unable to conceive any active power to be exerted without will. Every man knows infallibly that what is done by his conscious will and intention, is to be imputed to him, as the agent or cause; and that whatever is done without his will and intention, cannot be imputed to him with truth.

We judge of the actions and conduct of other men by the same rule as we judge of our own. In morals, it is self-evident that no man can be the object either of approbation or of blame for what he did not. But how shall we know whether it is his doing or not? If the action depended upon his will, and if he intended and willed it, it is his action in the judgment of all mankind. But if it was done without his knowledge, or without his will and intention, it is as certain that he did it not, and that it ought not to be imputed to him as the agent.

When there is any doubt to whom a particular action ought to be imputed, the doubt arises only from our ignorance of facts; when the facts relating to it are known, no man of understanding has any doubt to whom the action ought to be imputed.

The general rules of imputation are self-evident. They have been the same in all ages, and among all civilized nations. No man blames another for being black or fair, for having a fever or the falling sickness; because these things are believed not to be in his power; and they are believed not to be in his power, because they depend not upon his will. We can never conceive ‹39› that a man’s duty goes beyond his power, or that his power goes beyond what depends upon his will.

Reason leads us to ascribe unlimited power to the Supreme Being. But what do we mean by unlimited power? It is power to do whatsoever he

wills. To suppose him to do what he does not will to do, is absurd.

The only distinct conception I can form of active power is, that it is an attribute in a being by which he can do certain things if he wills. This, after all, is only a relative conception. It is relative to the effect, and to the will of producing it. Take away these, and the conception vanishes. They are the handles by which the mind takes hold of it. When they are taken away, our hold is gone. The same is the case with regard to other relative conceptions. Thus velocity is a real state of a body, about which Philos - ophers reason with the force of demonstration; but our conception of it is relative to space and time. What is velocity in a body? It is a state in which it passes through a certain space in a certain time. Space and time are very different from velocity; but we cannot conceive it but by its relation to them. The effect produced, and the will to produce it, are things different from active power, but we can have no conception of it, but by its relation to them.

Whether the conception of an efficient cause, and of real activity, could ever have entered into the mind of man, if we had not had the experience of activity in ourselves, I am not able to determine with certainty. The origin of many of our conceptions, and even of many of our judgments, is not so easily traced as Philosophers have generally conceived. No man can recollect the time when he first got the conception of an efficient cause, or the time when he first got the belief that an efficient cause is necessary to every change in nature. The conception of an efficient cause may very probably be derived from the ex ‹40›perience we have had in very early life of our own power to produce certain effects. But the belief, that no event can happen without an efficient cause, cannot be derived from experience. We may learn from experience what is, or what was, but no experience can teach us what necessarily must be.

In like manner, we probably derive the conception of pain from the experience we have had of it in ourselves; but our belief that pain can only exist in a being that hath life, cannot be got by experience, because it is a necessary truth; and no necessary truth can have its attestation from experience.

If it be so that the conception of an efficient cause enters into the mind, only from the early conviction we have that we are the efficients of our own voluntary actions, (which I think is most probable) the notion of efficiency will be reduced to this, That it is a relation between the cause and the effect, similar to that which is between us and our voluntary actions. This is surely the most distinct notion, and, I think, the only

notion we can form of real efficiency.

Now it is evident, that, to constitute the relation between me and my action, my conception of the action, and will to do it, are essential. For what I never conceived, nor willed, I never did.

If any man, therefore, affirms, that a being may be the efficient cause of an action, and have power to produce it, which that being can neither conceive nor will, he speaks a language which I do not understand. If he has a meaning, his notion of power and efficiency must be essentially different from mine; and, until he conveys his notion of efficiency to my understanding, I can no more assent to his opinion, than if he should affirm, that a being without life may feel pain.

‹41› It seems, therefore, to me most probable, that such beings only as have some degree of understanding and will, can possess active power; and that inanimate beings must be merely passive, and have no real activity. Nothing we perceive without us affords any good ground for ascribing active power to any inanimate being; and every thing we can discover in our own constitution, leads us to think, that active power cannot be exerted without will and intelligence.

CHAP. VI.

Of the efficient Causes of the Phænomena of Nature.[25]

If active power, in its proper meaning, requires a subject endowed with will and intelligence, what shall we say of those active powers which Philosophers teach us to ascribe to matter; the powers of corpuscular attraction, magnetism, electricity, gravitation, and others? Is it not universally allowed, that heavy bodies descend to the earth by the power of gravity; that, by the same power, the moon, and all the planets and comets, are retained in their orbits? Have the most eminent natural Philosophers been imposing upon us, and giving us words instead of real causes?

In answer to this, I apprehend, that the principles of natural philosophy have, in modern times, been built upon a foundation that cannot be shaken, and that they can be called in question only by those who do not

25. Cf. Reid's comments on James Gregory's 'Essay on the Difference between the Relation of Motive and Action, and that of Cause and Effect, in Physics: On Physical and Mathematical Principles', in Reid's *Correspondence*, pp. 254–5.

understand the evidence on which they stand. But the ambiguity of the words *cause*, *agency*, *active power*, and the other words related to these, has led many to understand them, when used in natural philosophy, in a wrong sense, and in a sense which is neither necessary for establishing ‹42› the true principles of natural philosophy, nor was ever meant by the most enlightened in that science.

To be convinced of this, we may observe, that those very Philosophers who attribute to matter the power of gravitation, and other active powers, teach us, at the same time, that matter is a substance altogether inert, and merely passive; that gravitation, and the other attractive or repulsive powers which they ascribe to it, are not inherent in its nature, but impressed upon it by some external cause, which they do not pretend to know, or to explain. Now, when we find wise men ascribing action and active power to a substance which they expressly teach us to consider as merely passive and acted upon by some unknown cause, we must conclude, that the action and active power ascribed to it are not to be understood strictly, but in some popular sense.

It ought likewise to be observed, that although Philosophers, for the sake of being understood, must speak the language of the vulgar, as when they say, the sun rises and sets, and goes through all the signs of the zodiac, yet they often think differently from the vulgar. Let us hear what the greatest of natural Philosophers says, in the 8th definition prefixed to his *Principia*, ‘Voces autem attractionis, impulsus, vel propensionis cujuscunque in centrum, indifferenter et pro se mutuo promiscue usurpo; has voces non physicè sed mathematicè considerando. Unde caveat lector, ne per hujus modi voces cogitet me speciem vel modum actionis, causamve aut rationem physicam, alicubi definire; vel centris (quæ sunt puncta mathematica) vires vere et physice tribuere, si forte centra trahere, aut vires centrorum esse, dixero.’[26]

In all languages, action is attributed to many things which all men of

26. Transl. ‘Further, it is in this sense that I call attractions and impulses accelerative and motive. Moreover, I use interchangeably and indiscriminately words sig - nifying attraction, impulse, or any sort of propensity toward a centre, consider- ing these forces not from a physical but only from a mathematical point of view. Therefore, let the reader beware of thinking that by words of this kind I am anywhere defining a species or mode of action or a physical cause or reason, or that I am attributing forces in a true and physical sense to centres (which are mathematical points) if I happen to say that centres attract or that centres have forces’: Newton, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* , p. 408. Reid mistranscribes the first sentence, in which the second ‘voces’ should be ‘vires’.

common understanding believe to be merely passive; thus we say, the wind blows, the rivers flow, the sea rages, the fire burns, bodies move, and impel other bodies.

‹43› Every object which undergoes any change, must be either active or passive in that change. This is self-evident to all men from the first dawn of reason; and therefore the change is always expressed in language, either by an active or a passive verb. Nor do I know any verb, expressive of a change, which does not imply either action or passion. The thing either changes, or it is changed. But it is remarkable in language, that when an external cause of the change is not obvious, the change is always imputed to the thing changed, as if it were animated, and had active power to produce the change in itself. So we say, the moon changes, the sun rises and goes down.

Thus active verbs are very often applied, and active power imputed to things, which a little advance in knowledge and experience teaches us to be merely passive. This property, common to all languages, I endeavoured to account for in the second chapter of this Essay, to which the reader is referred.

A like irregularity may be observed in the use of the word signifying *cause*, in all languages, and of the words related to it.

Our knowledge of causes is very scanty in the most advanced state of society, much more is it so in that early period in which language is formed. A strong desire to know the causes of things, is common to all men in every state; but the experience of all ages shews, that this keen appetite, rather than go empty, will feed upon the husks of real knowledge where the fruit cannot be found.

While we are very much in the dark with regard to the real agents or causes which produce the phænomena of nature, and have, at the same time, an avidity to know them, ingenious men frame conjectures, which those of weaker understanding take for truth. The fare is coarse, but appetite makes it goes down.

‹44› Thus, in a very ancient system, love and strife were made the causes of things.[27] PLATO made the causes of things to be matter, ideas, and an efficient architect. ARISTOTLE, matter, form, and privation. DES CARTES thought matter, and a certain quantity of motion given it by the Almighty at first, to be all that is necessary to make the material world.

27. Reid is referring to the system of the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles (*c*. 495–435 BCE), whom he knew from Johann Jakob Brucker, *Historia philosophica doctrinae de ideis*; see 6/II/6, 1.

LEIBNITZ conceived the whole universe, even the material part of it, to be made up of *monades*, each of which is active and intelligent, and produces in itself, by its own active power, all the changes it undergoes from the beginning of its existence to eternity.

In common language, we give the name of a *cause* to a reason, a motive, an end, to any circumstance which is connected with the effect, and goes before it.

ARISTOTLE, and the schoolmen after him, distinguished four kinds of causes, the efficient, the material, the formal, and the final. This, like many of ARISTOTLE's distinctions, is only a distinction of the various meanings of an ambiguous word; for the efficient, the matter, the form and the end, have nothing common in their nature, by which they may be accounted species of the same *genus*; but the Greek work which we translate *cause*, had these four different meanings in ARISTOTLE's days, and we have added other meanings. We do not indeed call the matter or the form of a thing its cause; but we have final causes, instrumental causes, occasional causes, and I know not how many others.

Thus the word *cause* has been so hackneyed, and made to have so many different meanings in the writings of Philosophers, and in the discourse of the vulgar, that its original and proper meaning is lost in the crowd.

With regard to the phænomena of nature, the important end of knowing their causes, besides gratifying our curiosity, is ‹45› that we may know when to expect them, or how to bring them about. This is very often of real importance in life; and this purpose is served, by knowing what, by the course of nature, goes before them and is connected with them; and this, therefore, we call the *cause* of such a phænomenon.

If a magnet be brought near to a mariner's compass, the needle, which was before at rest, immediately begins to move, and bends its course towards the magnet, or perhaps the contrary way. If an unlearned sailor is asked the cause of this motion of the needle, he is at no loss for an answer. He tells you it is the magnet; and the proof is clear; for, remove the magnet, and the effect ceases; bring it near, and the effect is again produced. It is, therefore, evident to sense, that the magnet is the cause of this effect.

A Cartesian Philosopher enters deeper into the cause of this phænomenon. He observes, that the magnet does not touch the needle, and therefore can give it no impulse. He pities the ignorance of the sailor. The effect is produced, says he, by magnetic effluvia, or subtile matter, which

passes from the magnet to the needle, and forces it from its place. He can even shew you, in a figure, where these magnetic effluvia issue from the magnet, what round they take, and what way they return home again. And thus he thinks he comprehends perfectly how, and by what cause, the motion of the needle is produced.

A Newtonian Philosopher enquires what proof can be offered for the existence of magnetic effluvia, and can find none. He therefore holds it as a fiction, a hypothesis; and he has learned that hypotheses ought to have no place in the philosophy of nature. He confesses his ignorance of the real cause of this motion, and thinks, that his business, as a Philosopher, is only to find from experiment the laws by which it is regulated in all cases.

‹46› These three persons differ much in their sentiments with regard to the real cause of this phænomenon; and the man who knows most is he who is sensible that he knows nothing of the matter. Yet all the three speak the same language, and acknowledge, that the cause of this motion is the attractive or repulsive power of the magnet.

What has been said of this, may be applied to every phænomenon that falls within the compass of natural philosophy. We deceive ourselves, if we conceive, that we can point out the real efficient cause of any one of them.

The grandest discovery ever made in natural philosophy, was that of the law of gravitation, which opens such a view of our planetary system, that it looks like something divine. But the author of this discovery was perfectly aware, that he discovered no real cause, but only the law or rule, according to which the unknown cause operates.

Natural Philosophers, who think accurately, have a precise meaning to the terms they use in the science; and when they pretend to shew the cause of any phænomenon of nature, they mean by the cause, a law of nature of which that phænomenon is a necessary consequence.

The whole object of natural philosophy, as NEWTON expressly teaches, is reducible to these two heads; first, by just induction from experiment and observation, to discover the laws of nature, and then to apply those laws to the solution of the phænomena of nature. [28] This was all that this great Philosopher attempted, and all that he thought attainable. And this indeed he attained in a great measure, with regard to the motions of our

28. Here Reid paraphrases the account given by Newton of the methods of analysis and synthesis at the conclusion of the *Opticks*: see *Opticks*, pp. 380–1.

planetary system, and with regard to the rays of light.

But supposing that all the phænomena that fall within the ‹47› reach of our senses, were accounted for from general laws of nature, justly deduced from experience; that is, supposing natural philosophy brought to its utmost perfection, it does not discover the efficient cause of any one phænomenon in nature.

The laws of nature are the rules according to which the effects are produced; but there must be a cause which operates according to these rules. The rules of navigation never navigated a ship. The rules of architecture never built a house.

Natural philosophers, by great attention to the course of nature, have discovered many of her laws, and have very happily applied them to account for many phænomena; but they have never discovered the efficient cause of any one phænomenon; nor do those who have distinct notions of the principles of the science, make any such pretence.

Upon the theatre of nature we see innumerable effects, which require an agent endowed with active power; but the agent is behind the scene. Whether it be the Supreme Cause alone, or a subordinate cause or causes; and if subordinate causes be employed by the Almighty, what their nature, their number, and their different offices may be, are things hid, for wise reasons without doubt, from the human eye.

It is only in human actions, that may be imputed for praise or blame, that it is necessary for us to know who is the agent; and in this, nature has given us all the light that is necessary for our conduct.

‹48›

CHAP. VII.

Of the Extent of Human Power.[29]

EVERY thing laudable and praise-worthy in man, must consist in the proper exercise of that power which is given him by his Maker. This is the talent which he is required to occupy, and of which he must give an account to him who committed it to his trust.

29. For the subjects in this chapter, see also Reid's comments on James Gregory's 'Essay on the Difference between the Relation of Motive and Action, and that of Cause and Effect, in Physics: On Physical and Mathematical Principles', in Reid's *Correspondence*, pp. 246–8.

To some persons more power is given than to others; and to the same person more at one time and less at another. Its existence, its extent, and its continuance, depend solely upon the pleasure of the Almighty; but every man that is accountable must have more or less of it. For, to call a person to account, to approve or disapprove of his conduct, who had no power to do good or ill, is absurd. No axiom of Euclid appears more evident than this.

As power is a valuable gift, to under-rate it is ingratitude to the giver; to over-rate it, begets pride and presumption, and leads to unsuccessful attempts. It is therefore, in every man, a point of wisdom to make a just estimate of his own power. *Quid ferre recusent, quid valeant humeri.*[30]

We can only speak of the power of man in general; and as our notion of power is relative to its effects, we can estimate its extent only by the effects which it is able to produce.

It would be wrong to estimate the extent of human power by the effects which it has actually produced. For every man had power to do many things which he did not, and not to do many ‹49› things which he did; otherwise he could not be an object either of approbation or of disapprobation, to any rational being.

The effects of human power are either immediate, or they are more remote.

The immediate effects, I think, are reducible to two heads. We can give certain motions to our own bodies; and we can give a certain direction to our own thoughts.

Whatever we can do beyond this, must be done by one of these means, or both.

We can produce no motion in any body in the universe, but by moving first our own body as an instrument. Nor can we produce thought in any other person, but by thought and motion in ourselves.

Our power to move our own body, is not only limited in its extent, but in its nature is subject to mechanical laws. It may be compared to a spring endowed with the power of contracting or expanding itself, but which cannot contract without drawing equally at both ends, nor expand without pushing equally at both ends; so that every action of the spring is always accompanied with an equal reaction in a contrary direction.

We can conceive a man to have power to move his whole body in any

30. Transl. '[And ponder long] what your shoulders refuse, and what they are able to bear': Horace, *De Arte Poetica*, in *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, ll. 39–40.

direction, without the aid of any other body, or a power to move one part of his body without the aid of any other part. But philosophy teaches us that man has no such power.

If he carries his whole body in any direction with a certain quantity of motion, this he can do only by pushing the earth, or some other body, with an equal quantity of motion in the con‹50›trary direction. If he but stretch out his arm in one direction, the rest of his body is pushed with an equal quantity of motion in the contrary direction.

This is the case with regard to all animal and voluntary motions, which come within the reach of our senses. They are performed by the contraction of certain muscles; and a muscle, when it is contracted, draws equally at both ends. As to the motions antecedent to the contraction of the muscle, and consequent upon the volition of the animal, we know nothing, and can say nothing about them.

We know not even how those immediate effects of our power are produced by our willing them. We perceive not any necessary connection between the volition and exertion on our part, and the motion of our body that follows them.

Anatomists inform us, that every voluntary motion of the body is performed by the contraction of certain muscles, and that the muscles are contracted by some influence derived from the nerves. But, without thinking in the least, either of muscles or nerves, we will only the external effect, and the internal machinery, without our call, immediately produces that effect.

This is one of the wonders of our frame, which we have reason to admire; but to account for it, is beyond the reach of our understanding.

That there is an established harmony between our willing certain motions of our bodies, and the operation of the nerves and muscles which produces those motions, is a fact known by experience. This volition is an act of the mind. But whether this act of the mind have any physical effect upon the nerves and muscles; or whether it be only an occasion of their being acted ‹51› upon by some other efficient, according to the established laws of nature, is hid from us. So dark is our conception of our own power when we trace it to its origin.

We have good reason to believe, that matter had its origin from mind, as well as all its motions; but how, or in what manner, it is moved by mind, we know as little as how it was created.

It is possible therefore, for any thing we know, that what we call the immediate effects of our power, may not be so in the strictest sense.

Between the will to produce the effect, and the production of it, there may be agents or instruments of which we are ignorant.

This may leave some doubt, whether we be in the strictest sense, the efficient cause of the voluntary motions of our own body. But it can produce no doubt with regard to the moral estimation of our actions.

The man who knows that such an event depends upon his will, and who deliberately wills to produce it, is, in the strictest moral sense, the cause of the event; and it is justly imputed to him, whatever physical causes may have concurred in its production.

Thus, he who maliciously intends to shoot his neighbour dead, and voluntarily does it, is undoubtedly the cause of his death, though he did no more to occasion it than draw the trigger of the gun. He neither gave to the ball its velocity, nor to the powder its expansive force, nor to the flint and steel the power to strike fire; but he knew that what he did must be followed by the man's death, and did it with that intention; and therefore he is justly chargeable with the murder.

Philosophers may therefore dispute innocently, whether we ‹52› be the proper efficient causes of the voluntary motions of our own body; or whether we be only, as MALEBRANCHE thinks, the occasional causes. The determination of this question, if it can be determined, can have no effect on human conduct.

The other branch of what is immediately in our power, is to give a certain direction to our own thoughts. This, as well as the first branch, is limited in various ways. It is greater in some persons than in others, and in the same person is very different, according to the health of his body, and the state of his mind. But that men, when free from disease of body and of mind, have a considerable degree of power of this kind, and that it may be greatly increased by practice and habit, is sufficiently evident from experience, and from the natural conviction of all mankind.

Were we to examine minutely into the connection between our volitions, and the direction of our thoughts which obeys these volitions; were we to consider how we are able to give attention to an object for a certain time, and turn our attention to another when we chuse, we might perhaps find it difficult to determine, whether the mind itself be the sole efficient cause of the voluntary changes in the direction of our thoughts, or whether it requires the aid of other efficient causes.

I see no good reason why the dispute about efficient and occasional causes, may not be applied to the power of directing our thoughts, as well as to the power of moving our bodies. In both cases, I apprehend

the dispute is endless, and if it could be brought to an issue, would be fruitless.

Nothing appears more evident to our reason, than that there must be an efficient cause of every change that happens in nature. But when I attempt to comprehend the manner in which an efficient cause operates, either upon body or upon mind, ‹53› there is a darkness which my faculties are not able to penetrate.

However small the immediate effects of human power seem to be, its more remote effects are very considerable.

In this respect, the power of man may be compared to the Nile, the Ganges, and other great rivers, which make a figure upon the globe of the earth, and, traversing vast regions, bring sometimes great benefit, at other times great mischief to many nations; yet, when we trace those rivers to their source, we find them to rise from inconsiderable fountains and rills.

The command of a mighty prince, what is it, but the sound of his breath, modified by his organs of speech? But it may have great consequences; it may raise armies, equip fleets, and spread war and desolation over a great part of the earth.

The meanest of mankind has considerable power to do good, and more to hurt himself and others.

From this I think we may conclude, that, although the degeneracy of mankind be great, and justly to be lamented, yet men, in general, are more disposed to employ their power in doing good, than in doing hurt to their fellow-men. The last is much more in their power than the first; and, if they were as much disposed to it, human society could not subsist, and the species must soon perish from the earth.

We may first consider the effects which may be produced by human power upon the material system.

It is confined indeed to the planet which we inhabit; we cannot remove to another; nor can we produce any change in the annual or diurnal motions of our own.

‹54› But, by human power, great changes may be made upon the face of the earth; and those treasures of metal and minerals that are stored up in its bowels, may be discovered and brought forth.

The Supreme Being could, no doubt, have made the earth to supply the wants of man, without any cultivation by human labour. Many inferior animals, who neither plant, nor sow, nor spin, are provided for by the bounty of Heaven. But this is not the case with man.

He has active powers and ingenuity given him, by which he can do

much for supplying his wants; and his labour is made necessary for that purpose.

His wants are more than those of any other animal that inhabits this globe; and his resources are proportioned to them, and put within the sphere of his power.

The earth is left by nature in such a state as to require cultivation for the accommodation of man.

It is capable of cultivation, in most places, to such a degree, that, by human labour, it may afford subsistence to an hundred times the number of men it could in its natural state.

Every tribe of men, in every climate, must labour for their subsistence and accommodation; and their supply is more or less comfortable, in proportion to the labour properly employed for that purpose.

It is evidently the intention of Nature, that man should be laborious, and that he should exert his powers of body and mind for his own, and for the common good. And, by his power properly applied, he may make great improvement upon the fer ‹55›tility of the earth, and a great addition to his own accommodation and comfortable state.

By clearing, tilling and manuring the ground, by planting and sowing, by building cities and harbours, draining marshes and lakes, making rivers navigable, and joining them by canals, by manufacturing the rude materials which the earth, duly cultivated, produces in abundance, by the mutual exchange of commodities and of labour, he may make the barren wilderness the habitation of rich and populous states.

If we compare the city of Venice, the province of Holland, the empire of China, with those places of the earth which never felt the hand of industry, we may form some conception of the extent of human power upon the material system, in changing the face of the earth, and furnishing the accommodations of human life.

But, in order to produce those happy changes, man himself must be improved.

His animal faculties are sufficient for the preservation of the species; they grow up of themselves, like the trees of the forest, which require only the force of nature and the influences of Heaven.

His rational and moral faculties, like the earth itself, are rude and barren by nature, but capable of a high degree of culture; and this culture he must receive from parents, from instructors, from those with whom he lives in society, joined with his own industry.

If we consider the changes that may be produced by man upon his own

mind, and upon the minds of others, they appear to be great.

‹56› Upon his own mind he may make great improvement, in acquiring the treasures of useful knowledge, the habits of skill in arts, the habits of wisdom, prudence, self-command, and every other virtue. It is the constitution of nature, that such qualities as exalt and dignify human nature are to be acquired by proper exertions; and, by a contrary conduct, such qualities as debase it below the condition of brutes.

Even upon the minds of others, great effects may be produced by means within the compass of human power; by means of good education, of proper instruction, of persuasion, of good example, and by the discipline of laws and government.

That these have often had great and good effects on the civilization and improvement of individuals, and of nations, cannot be doubted. But what happy effects they might have, if applied universally with the skill and address that is within the reach of human wisdom and power, is not easily conceived, or to what pitch the happiness of human society, and the improvement of the species, might be carried.

What a noble, what a divine employment of human power is here assigned us? How ought it to rouse the ambition of parents, of instructors, of lawgivers, of magistrates, of every man in his station, to contribute his part towards the accomplishment of so glorious an end?

The power of man over his own and other minds, when we trace it to its origin, is involved in darkness, no less than his power to move his own and other bodies.

How far we are properly efficient causes, how far occasional causes, I cannot pretend to determine.

We know that habit produces great changes in the mind; but‹57› how it does so, we know not. We know, that example has a powerful, and, in the early period of life, almost an irresistible effect; but we know not how it produces this effect. The communication of thought, sentiment and passion, from one mind to another, has something in it as mysterious as the communication of motion from one body to another.

We perceive one event to follow another, according to established laws of nature, and we are accustomed to call the first the cause, and the last the effect, without knowing what is the bond that unites them. In order to produce a certain event, we use means which, by laws of nature, are connected with that event; and we call ourselves the cause of that event, though other efficient causes may have had the chief hand in its production.

Upon the whole, human power, in its existence, in its extent, and in its exertions, is entirely dependent upon GOD, and upon the laws of nature which he has established. This ought to banish pride and arrogance from the most mighty of the sons of men. At the same time, that degree of power which we have received from the bounty of Heaven, is one of the noblest gifts of GOD to man; of which we ought not to be insensible, that we may not be ungrateful, and that we may be excited to make the proper use of it.

The extent of human power is perfectly suited to the state of man, as a state of improvement and discipline. It is sufficient to animate us to the noblest exertions. By the proper exercise of this gift of GOD, human nature, in individuals and in societies, may be exalted to a high degree of dignity and felicity, and the earth become a paradise. On the contrary, its perversion and abuse is the cause of most of the evils that afflict human life.

‹59›

ESSAY II.

OF THE WILL.[1]

CHAP. I.

Observations concerning the Will.

EVERY man is conscious of a power to determine, in things which he conceives to depend upon his determination. To this power we give the name of *will*; and, as it is usual, in the operations of the mind, to give the same name to the power and to the act of that power, the term *will* is often put to signify the act of determining, which more properly is called *volition*.

Volition, therefore, signifies the act of willing and determining, and will is put indifferently to signify either the power of willing or the act.

But the term *will* has very often, especially in the writings of Philos - ophers, a more extensive meaning, which we must carefully distinguish from that which we have now given.

In the general division of our faculties into understanding and will, our passions, appetites and affections are comprehended under the will; and so it is made to signify, not only our determination to act or not to act, but every motive and incitement to action.

‹60› It is this, probably, that has led some Philosophers to represent desire, aversion, hope, fear, joy, sorrow, all our appetites, passions and affections, as different modifications of the will, which, I think, tends to confound things which are very different in their nature.[2]

1. For the earliest preserved notes by Reid on this general topic, see 6/I/34–5. They are dated 1736. See also 7/V/23, 4–8 and the 1765 lecture in 4/II/13. Reid is recorded as giving a paper to the Glasgow Literary Society on 12 December 1777, entitled 'Observations on that Act of the Human Mind which we call Volition or Willing'. See also his comments on James Gregory's 'Essay on the Difference between the Relation of Motive and Action, and that of Cause and Effect, in Physics: On Physical and Mathematical Principles', in Reid's *Correspondence*, pp. 245–6.
2. In his lecture on 23 December 1765 Reid identified 'Dr. Hutcheson and other of the most accurate Philosophers' as proponents of this idea (4/II/13, 2). See, e.g., Hutcheson, *Philosophiae moralis institutio / Short Introduction*, I.1.v, pp. 28–9,

The advice given to a man, and his determination consequent to that advice, are things so different in their nature, that it would be improper to call them modifications of one and the same thing. In like manner, the motives to action, and the determination to act or not to act, are things that have no common nature, and therefore ought not to be confounded under one name, or represented as different modifications of the same thing.

For this reason, in speaking of the will in this Essay, I do not comprehend under that term any of the incitements or motives which may have an influence upon our determinations, but solely the determination itself, and the power to determine.

Mr LOCKE has considered this operation of the mind more attentively, and distinguished it more accurately, than some very ingenious authors who wrote after him.

He defines volition to be, 'An act of the mind knowingly exerting that dominion it takes itself to have over any part of the man, by employing it in, or with-holding it from any particular action.'[3]

It may more briefly be defined, The determination of the mind to do, or not to do something which we conceive to be in our power.

If this were given as a strictly logical definition, it would be liable to this objection, that the determination of the mind is ‹61› only another term for volition. But it ought to be observed, that the most simple acts of the mind do not admit of a logical definition. The way to form a clear notion of them is, to reflect attentively upon them as we feel them in ourselves. Without this reflection, no definition can give us a distinct conception of them.

For this reason, rather than sift any definition of the will, I shall make some observations upon it, which may lead us to reflect upon it, and to distinguish it from other acts of mind, which, from the ambiguity of words, are apt to be confounded with it.

First, Every act of will must have an object. He that wills must will

and *System*, I, pp. 7–9. In his notes on Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of Will*, Reid indicates his complaint that Edwards does not properly distinguish will from desire (3/II/6, 4). He may have had in mind also David Hartley and Joseph Priestley: see, e.g., Hartley, *Observations on Man* , Part I, Section III, Prop. 89, p. 371; Priestley, *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity*, Section IV, pp. 34–6. Reid argued his case similarly against Kames in their correspondence; see *Correspondence,* pp. 131–2, 134. Denial of the existence of a distinct faculty of will was a common move among necessitarian writers before Hartley and Priestley, including Hobbes and Spinoza.

3. *Essay*, II.xxi.15: p. 240.

something; and that which he wills is called the object of his volition. As a man cannot think without thinking of something, nor remember without remembering something, so neither can he will without willing something. Every act of will, therefore, must have an object; and the person who wills must have some conception, more or less distinct, of what he wills.

By this, things done voluntarily are distinguished from things done merely from instinct, or merely from habit.

A healthy child, some hours after its birth, feels the sensation of hunger, and, if applied to the breast, sucks and swallows its food very perfectly. We have no reason to think, that, before it ever sucked, it has any conception of that complex operation, or how it is performed. It cannot, therefore, with propriety, be said, that it wills to suck.

Numberless instances might be given of things done by animals without any previous conception of what they are to do; without the intention of doing it. They act by some inward blind im ‹62›pulse, of which the efficient cause is hid from us; and though there is an end evidently intended by the action, this intention is not in the animal, but in its Maker.

Other things are done by habit, which cannot properly be called voluntary. We shut our eyes several times every minute while we are awake; no man is conscious of willing this every time he does it.

A *second* observation is, That the immediate object of will must be some action of our own.

By this, will is distinguished from two acts of the mind, which sometimes take its name, and thereby are apt to be confounded with it; these are desire and command.

The distinction between will and desire has been well explained by Mr LOCKE;[4] yet many later writers have overlooked it, and have represented desire as a modification of will.[5]

Desire and will agree in this, that both must have an object, of which we must have some conception; and therefore both must be accompanied with some degree of understanding. But they differ in several things.

The object of desire may be any thing which appetite, passion or affection, leads us to pursue; it may be any event which we think good for us, or for those to whom we are well affected. I may desire meat, or drink, or ease from pain: But to say that I will meat, or will drink, or will ease from

4. *Essay*, II.xxi.30: pp. 249–50.
5. See note 2, pp. 46–7.

pain, is not English. There is therefore a distinction in common language between desire and will. And the distinction is, That what we will must be an action, and our own action; what we desire may not be our own action, it may be no action at all.

‹63› A man desires that his children may be happy, and that they may behave well. Their being happy is no action at all; their behaving well is not his action but theirs.

With regard to our own actions, we may desire what we do not will, and will what we do not desire; nay, what we have a great aversion to.

A man a-thirst has a strong desire to drink, but, for some particular reason, he determines not to gratify his desire. A judge, from a regard to justice, and to the duty of his office, dooms a criminal to die, while, from humanity or particular affection, he desires that he should live. A man for health may take a nauseous draught, for which he has no desire but a great aversion. Desire therefore, even when its object is some action of our own, is only an incitement to will, but it is not volition. The determination of the mind may be, not to do what we desire to do. But as desire is often accompanied by will, we are apt to overlook the distinction between them.

The command of a person is sometimes called his will, sometimes his desire; but when these words are used properly, they signify three different acts of the mind.

The immediate object of will is some action of our own; the object of a command is some action of another person, over whom we claim authority; the object of desire may be no action at all.

In giving a command all these acts concur; and as they go together, it is not uncommon in language, to give to one the name which properly belongs to another.

A command being a voluntary action, there must be a will to‹64› give the command: Some desire is commonly the motive to that act of will, and the command is the effect of it.

Perhaps it may be thought that a command is only a desire expressed by language, that the thing commanded should be done. But it is not so. For a desire may be expressed by language when there is no command; and there may possibly be a command without any desire that the thing commanded should be done. There have been instances of tyrants who have laid grievous commands upon their subjects, in order to reap the penalty of their disobedience, or to furnish a pretence for their punishment.

We might farther observe, that a command is a social act of the mind. It can have no existence but by a communication of thought to some intelligent being; and therefore implies a belief that there is such a being, and that we can communicate our thoughts to him.

Desire and will are solitary acts, which do not imply any such com - munication or belief.

The immediate object of volition therefore, must be some action, and our own action.

A *third* observation is, That the object of our volition must be something which we believe to be in our power, and to depend upon our will.

A man may desire to make a visit to the moon, or to the planet Jupiter, but he cannot will or determine to do it; because he knows it is not in his power. If an insane person should make an attempt, his insanity must first make him believe it to be in his power.

‹65› A man in his sleep may be struck with a palsy, which deprives him of the power of speech; when he awakes, he attempts to speak, not knowing that he has lost the power. But when he knows by experience that the power is gone, he ceases to make the effort.

The same man, knowing that some persons have recovered the power of speech after they had lost it by a paralytical stroke, may now and then make an effort. In this effort, however, there is not properly a will to speak, but a will to try whether he can speak or not.

In like manner, a man may exert his strength to raise a weight which is too heavy for him. But he always does this, either from the belief that he can raise the weight, or for a trial whether he can or not. It is evident therefore, that what we will must be believed to be in our power, and to depend upon our will.

The *next* observation is, That when we will to do a thing immediately, the volition is accompanied with an effort to execute that which we willed.

If a man wills to raise a great weight from the ground by the strength of his arm, he makes an effort for that purpose proportioned to the weight he determines to raise. A great weight requires a great effort; a small weight a less effort. We say indeed, that to raise a very small body requires no effort at all. But this, I apprehend, must be understood either as a figurative way of speaking, by which things very small are accounted as nothing; or it is owing to our giving no attention to very small efforts, and therefore having no name for them.

Great efforts, whether of body or mind, are attended with difficulty,

and when long continued produce lassitude, which re‹66›quires that they should be intermitted. This leads us to reflect upon them and to give them a name. The name *effort* is commonly appropriated to them; and those that are made with ease, and leave no sensible effect, pass without observation and without a name, though they be of the same kind, and differ only in degree from those to which the name is given.

This effort we are conscious of, if we will but give attention to it; and there is nothing in which we are in a more strict sense active.

The *last* observation is, That in all determinations of the mind that are of any importance, there must be something in the preceding state of the mind that disposes or inclines us to that determination.

If the mind were always in a state of perfect indifference, without any incitement, motive, or reason, to act, or not to act, to act one way rather than another, our active power, having no end to pursue, no rule to direct its exertions, would be given in vain. We should either be altogether inactive, and never will to do any thing, or our volitions would be perfectly unmeaning and futile, being neither wise nor foolish, virtuous nor vicious.

We have reason therefore to think, that to every being to whom GOD hath given any degree of active power, he hath also given some principles of action, for the direction of that power to the end for which it was intended.

It is evident that, in the constitution of man, there are various principles of action suited to our state and situation. A particular consideration of these is the subject of the next essay; in this we are only to consider them in general, with a view to examine the relation they bear to volition, and how it is influenced by them.

‹67›

CHAP. II.

Of the Influence of Incitements and Motives upon the Will.

WE come into the world ignorant of every thing, yet we must do many things in order to our subsistence and well-being. A new-born child may be carried in arms, and kept warm by his nurse; but he must suck and swallow his food for himself. And this must be done before he has any conception of sucking or swallowing, or of the manner in which they are to be performed. He is led by nature to do these actions without knowing

for what end, or what he is about. This we call *instinct*.

In many cases there is no time for voluntary determination. The motions must go on so rapidly, that the conception and volition of every movement cannot keep pace with them. In some cases of this kind, instinct, in others habit, comes in to our aid.

When a man stumbles and loses his balance, the motion necessary to prevent his fall would come too late, if it were the consequence of thinking what is fit to be done, and making a voluntary effort for that purpose. He does this instinctively.

When a man beats a drum or plays a tune, he has not time to direct every particular beat or stop, by a voluntary determination; but the habit which may be acquired by exercise, answers the purpose as well.

By instinct therefore, and by habit, we do many things without any exercise either of judgment or will.

In other actions the will is exerted, but without judgment.

‹68› Suppose a man to know that, in order to live, he must eat. What shall he eat? How much? And how often? His reason can answer none of these questions; and therefore can give no direction how he should determine. Here again nature, as an indulgent parent, supplies the defects of his reason; giving him appetite, which shews him when he is to eat, how often, and how much; and taste, which informs him what he is, and what he is not to eat. And by these principles he is much better directed than he could be without them, by all the knowledge he can acquire.

As the Author of nature has given us some principles of action to supply the defects of our knowledge, he has given others to supply the defects of our wisdom and virtue.

The natural desires, affections and passions, which are common to the wise and to the foolish, to the virtuous and to the vicious, and even to the more sagacious brutes, serve very often to direct the course of human actions. By these principles men may perform the most laborious duties of life, without any regard to duty; and do what is proper to be done, without regard to propriety; like a vessel that is carried on in her proper course by a prosperous gale, without the skill or judgment of those that are aboard.

Appetite, affection, or passion, give an impulse to a certain action. In this impulse there is no judgment implied. It may be weak or strong; we can even conceive it irresistible. In the case of madness it is so. Madmen have their appetites and passions; but they want the power of self-government; and therefore we do not impute their actions to the man

but to the disease.

In actions that proceed from appetite or passion, we are passive in part, and only in part active. They are therefore part ‹69›ly imputed to the passion; and if it is supposed to be irresistible, we do not impute them to the man at all.

Even an American savage judges in this manner: When in a fit of drunkenness he kills his friend: As soon as he comes to himself, he is very sorry for what he has done; but pleads that drink, and not he, was the cause.

We conceive brute-animals to have no superior principle to control their appetites and passions. On this account, their actions are not subject to law. Men are in a like state in infancy, in madness, and in the delirium of a fever. They have appetites and passions, but they want that which make them moral agents, accountable for their conduct, and objects of moral approbation or of blame.

In some cases, a stronger impulse of appetite or passion may oppose a weaker. Here also there may be determination and action without judgment.

Suppose a soldier ordered to mount a breach, and certain of present death if he retreats, this man needs not courage to go on, fear is sufficient. The certainty of present death if he retreats, is an overbalance to the probability of being killed if he goes on. The man is pushed by contrary forces, and it requires neither judgment nor exertion to yield to the strongest.

A hungry dog acts by the same principle, if meat is set before him, with a threatening to beat him if he touch it. Hunger pushes him forward, fear pushes him back with more force, and the strongest force prevails.

Thus we see, that, in many even of our voluntary actions, we may act from the impulse of appetite, affection, or passion, ‹70› without any exercise of judgment, and much in the same manner as brute-animals seem to act.

Sometimes, however, there is a calm in the mind from the gales of passion or appetite, and the man is left to work his way, in the voyage of life, without those impulses which they give. Then he calmly weighs goods and evils, which are at too great a distance to excite any passion. He judges what is best upon the whole, without feeling any bias drawing him to one side. He judges for himself as he would do for another in his situation; and the determination is wholly imputable to the man, and not in any degree to his passion.

Every man come to years of understanding, who has given any

attention to his own conduct, and to that of others, has, in his mind, a scale or measure of goods and evils, more or less exact. He makes an estimate of the value of health, of reputation, of riches, of pleasure, of virtue, of self-approbation, and of the approbation of his Maker. These things, and their contraries, have a comparative importance in his cool and deliberate judgment.

When a man considers whether health ought to be preferred to bodily strength, fame to riches, whether a good conscience and the approbation of his Maker, to every thing that can come in competition with it; this appears to me to be an exercise of judgment, and not any impulse of passion or appetite.

Every thing worthy of pursuit, must be so, either intrinsically, and upon its own account, or as the means of procuring something that is intrinsically valuable. That it is by judgment that we discern the fitness of means for attaining an end, is self-evident; and in this, I think, all Philosophers agree. But that it is the office of judgment to appreciate the value of an end, or the ‹71› preference due to one end above another, is not granted by some Philosophers.[6]

In determining what is good or ill, and, of different goods, which is best, they think we must be guided, not by judgment, but by some natural or acquired taste, which makes us relish one thing and dislike another.

Thus, if one man prefers cheese to lobsters, another lobsters to cheese, it is vain, say they, to apply judgment to determine which is right. In like manner, if one man prefers pleasure to virtue, another virtue to pleasure, this is a matter of taste, judgment has nothing to do in it. This seems to be the opinion of some Philosophers.

I cannot help being of a contrary opinion. I think we may form a judgment, both in the question about cheese and lobsters, and in the more important question about pleasure and virtue.

When one man feels a more agreeable relish in cheese, another in lobsters, this, I grant, requires no judgment; it depends only upon the constitution of the palate. But, if we would determine which of the two has the best taste, I think the question must be determined by judgment; and that, with a small share of this faculty, we may give a very certain

6. See, e.g., Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part 1, Chap. 6, p. 39; Hutcheson, *Essay*, Treatise 2, Section 1, pp. 144–6; Hume, *Treatise*, 2.3.3 (‘Of the influencing motives of the will’).

determination, to wit, that the two tastes are equally good, and that both of the persons do equally well, in preferring what suits their palate and their stomach.

Nay, I apprehend, that the two persons who differ in their taste will, notwithstanding that difference, agree perfectly in their judgment, that both tastes are upon a footing of equality, and that neither has a just claim to preference.

Thus, it appears, that, in this instance, the office of taste is ‹72› very different from that of judgment; and that men, who differ most in taste, may agree perfectly in their judgment, even with respect to the tastes wherein they differ.

To make the other case parallel with this, it must be supposed, that the man of pleasure and the man of virtue agree in their judgment, and that neither sees any reason to prefer the one course of life to the other.

If this be supposed, I shall grant, that neither of these persons has reason to condemn the other. Each chuses according to his taste, in matters which his best judgment determines to be perfectly indifferent.

But it is to be observed, that this supposition cannot have place, when we speak of men, or indeed of moral agents. The man who is incapable of perceiving the obligation of virtue, when he uses his best judgment, is a man in name, but not in reality. He is incapable either of virtue or vice, and is not a moral agent.

Even the man of pleasure, when his judgment is unbiassed, sees, that there are certain things which a man ought not to do, though he should have a taste for them. If a thief breaks into his house and carries off his goods, he is perfectly convinced that he did wrong and deserves punishment, although he had as strong a relish for the goods as he himself has for the pleasures he pursues.

It is evident, that mankind, in all ages, have conceived two parts in the human constitution that may have influence upon our voluntary actions. These we call by the general names of *passion* and *reason*; and we shall find, in all languages, names that are equivalent.

‹73› Under the former, we comprehend various principles of action, similar to those we observe in brute-animals, and in men who have not the use of reason. *Appetites, affections, passions*, are the names by which they are denominated; and these names are not so accurately distinguished in common language, but that they are used somewhat promiscuously. This, however, is common to them all, that they draw a man toward a certain object, without any farther view, by a kind of

violence; a violence which indeed may be resisted if the man is master of himself, but cannot be resisted without a struggle.

CICERO's phrase for expressing their influence is, 'Hominem huc et illuc rapiunt.'[7] Dr HUTCHESON uses a similar phrase, 'Quibus agitatur mens et bruto quodam impetu fertur.'[8] There is no exercise of reason for judgment necessary in order to feel their influence.

With regard to this part of the human constitution, I see no difference between the vulgar and Philosophers.

As to the other part of our constitution, which is commonly called *reason*, as opposed to passion, there have been very subtile disputes among modern Philosophers, whether it ought to be called reason, or be not rather some internal sense or taste.[9]

Whether it ought to be called reason, or by what other name, I do not here enquire,[10] but what kind of influence it has upon our voluntary actions.

As to this point, I think, all men must allow that this is the manly part of our constitution, the other the brute part. This operates in a calm and dispassionate manner; a manner so like to judgment or reason, that even those who do not allow it to be called by that name, endeavour to account for its having al ‹74›ways had the name; because, in the manner of its operation, it has a similitude to reason.

As the similitude between this principle and reason has led mankind to give it that name, so the dissimilitude between it and passion has led them to set the two in opposition. They have considered this cool principle, as having an influence upon our actions so different from passion, that what a man does coolly and deliberately, without passion, is imputed solely to the man, whether it have merit or demerit; whereas, what he does from passion is imputed in part to the passion. If the passion be conceived to be irresistible, the action is imputed solely to it, and not at all to the man. If he had power to resist, and ought to have resisted, we blame him for not

7. Transl. '[One force is appetite] ... which impels a man this way and that': *De officiis*, II.xxviii (101): p. 102.
8. Transl. '... [certain vehement turbulent Impulses,] which ... agitate the soul, and hurry it on with a blind inconsiderate force ...': Hutcheson,*Philosophiae moralis institutio /Short Introduction*, I.1.vi: pp. 28–9.
9. These disputes were initiated by Hutcheson's *Inquiry*. Shaftesbury, like Butler after him, left the question open, whether the moral faculty is better thought of as a kind of judgment or a kind of sense. For Reid's further discussion of the issue and for the relevant references, see notes 93 and 94, p. 175, and note 6, p. 278.
10. See below, Essay III, Part iii, Chap. 6, and Essay VChap. 7, for Reid's treatment of this question.

doing his duty; but, in proportion to the violence of the passion, the fault is alleviated.

By this cool principle, we judge what ends are most worthy to be pursued, how far every appetite and passion may be indulged, and when it ought to be resisted.

It directs us, not only to resist the impulse of passion when it would lead us wrong, but to avoid the occasions of inflaming it; like CYRUS, who refused to see the beautiful captive princess. In this he acted the part both of a wise and a good man; firm in the love of virtue, and, at the same time, conscious of the weakness of human nature, and unwilling to put it to too severe a trial. In this case, the youth of CYRUS, the incomparable beauty of his captive, and every circumstance which tended to inflame his desire, exalts the merit of his conduct in resisting it.[11]

It is in such actions that the superiority of human nature appears, and the specific difference between it and that of brutes. In them we may observe one passion combating another, and the strongest prevailing; but we perceive no calm principle in their ‹75› constitution, that is superior to every passion, and able to give law to it.

The difference between these two parts of our constitution may be farther illustrated by an instance or two wherein passion prevails.

If a man, upon great provocation, strike another when he ought to keep the peace, he blames himself for what he did, and acknowledges that he ought not to have yielded to his passion. Every other person agrees with his sober judgment. They think he did wrong in yielding to his passion, when he might and ought to have resisted its impulse. If they thought it impossible to bear the provocation, they would not blame him at all; but believing that it was in his power, and was his duty, they impute to him some degree of blame, acknowledging, at the same time, that it is alleviated in proportion to the provocation; so that the trespass is imputed, partly to the man, and partly to the passion. But, if a man deliberately conceives a design of mischief against his neighbour, contrives the means, and executes it, the action admits of no alleviation, it is perfectly voluntary, and he bears the whole guilt of the evil intended and done.

If a man, by the agony of the rack, is made to disclose a secret of

11. Reid probably alludes to an anecdote in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, a partly fictional account of the life and deeds of the Persian king Cyrus the Great (557–530 BCE). The beautiful princess is Pantheia, captured wife of Abradatas of Susa: see Books 5 and 6.

importance, with which he is entrusted, we pity him more than we blame him. We consider, that such is the weakness of human nature, that the resolution, even of a good man, might be overcome by such a trial. But if he have strength of mind, which even the agony of the rack could not subdue, we admire his fortitude as truly heroical.

Thus, I think, it appears, that the common sense of men (which, in matters of common life, ought to have great authority) has led them to distinguish two parts in the human constitu‹76›tion, which have influence upon our voluntary determinations. There is an irrational part, common to us with brute-animals, consisting of appetites, affections and passions, and there is a cool and rational part. The first, in many cases, gives a strong impulse, but without judgment, and without authority. The second is always accompanied with authority. All wisdom and virtue consist in following its dictates; all vice and folly in disobeying them. We may resist the impulses of appetite and passion, not only without regret, but with self-applause and triumph; but the calls of reason and duty can never be resisted, without remorse and self-condemnation.

The ancient Philosophers agreed with the vulgar, in making this distinction of the principles of action. The irrational part the Greeks called *ὁρμη*. CICERO calls it *appetitus*, taking that word in an extensive sense, so as to include every propensity to action which is not grounded on judgment.[12]

The other principle the Greeks called *νους*; PLATO calls it the *ἡγημονικον* or leading principle. '*Duplex enim est vis animorum atque naturæ,*' says CICERO, '*una pars in appetitu posita est, quæ est ὁρμη Græcè, quæ hominem huc et illuc rapit; altera in ratione, quæ docet, et explanat, quid faciendum fugiendumve sit ; ita fit ut ratio præsit appetitusobtemperet.*'[13]

The reason of explaining this distinction here is, that these two principles influence the will in different ways. Their influence differs, not in degree only, but in kind. This difference we feel, though it may be

12. Cicero, *De officiis*, I.xxviii–xxix (101–2) and I.xxxix (141). The terminology is Stoic, but the *locus classicus* for Reid's basic idea is undoubtedly Plato's initial discussion of desire and reason in the latter part of Book 4 (435e onwards) of *The Republic*.

13. Transl. 'Now we find that the essential activity of the spirit is twofold: one force is appetite (that is, *ὁρμη*, in Greek), which impels a man this way and that; the other is reason, which teaches and explains what should be done and what should be left undone. The result is that reason commands, appetite obeys': *De officiis*, I. xxviii (101): p. 103.

difficult to find words to express it. We may perhaps more easily form a notion of it by a similitude.

It is one thing to push a man from one part of the room to another; it is a thing of a very different nature to use arguments to persuade him to leave his place, and go to another. ‹77› He may yield to the force which pushes him, without any exercise of his rational faculties; nay, he must yield to it, if he do not oppose an equal or a greater force. His liberty is impaired in some degree; and, if he has not power sufficient to oppose, his liberty is quite taken away, and the motion cannot be imputed to him at all. The influence of appetite or passion seems to me to be very like to this. If the passion be supposed irresistible, we impute the action to it solely, and not to the man. If he had power to resist, but yields after a struggle, we impute the action, partly to the man, and partly to the passion.

If we attend to the other case, when the man is only urged by arguments to leave his place, this resembles the operation of the cool or rational principle. It is evident, that, whether he yields to the arguments or not, the determination is wholly his own act, and is entirely to be imputed to him. Arguments, whatever be the degree of their strength, diminish not a man's liberty; they may produce a cool conviction of what we ought to do, and they can do no more. But appetite and passion give an impulse to act and impair liberty, in proportion to their strength.

With most men, the impulse of passion is more effectual than bare conviction; and, on this account, orators, who would persuade, find it necessary to address the passions, as well as to convince the understanding; and, in all systems of rhetoric, these two have been considered as different intentions of the orator, and to be accomplished by different means.

‹78›

CHAP. III.

Of Operations of Mind which may be called Voluntary.[14]

THE faculties of understanding and will are easily distinguished in thought, but very rarely, if ever, disjoined in operation.

14. Central ideas in this chapter go back to a question discussed in the Aberdeen Philosophical Society on 15 April 1761 and in the Glasgow Literary Society on 9 May 1766 (2/II/13, cf. 6/I/12) and again on 12 December 1777 (cf. *Correspondence*, p. 213). Cf. Reid's comments on James Gregory's 'Essay

In most, perhaps in all the operations of mind for which we have names in language, both faculties are employed, and we are both intellective and active.

Whether it be possible that intelligence may exist without some degree of activity, or impossible, is perhaps beyond the reach of our faculties to determine; but, I apprehend, that, in fact, they are always conjoined in the operation of our minds.

It is probable, I think, that there is some degree of activity in those operations which we refer to the understanding; accordingly, they have always, and in all languages, been expressed by active verbs; as, I see, I hear, I remember, I apprehend, I judge, I reason. And it is certain, that every act of will must be accompanied by some operation of the understanding; for he that wills must apprehend what he wills, and apprehension belongs to the understanding.

The operations I am to consider in this chapter, I think, have commonly been referred to the understanding; but we shall find that the will has so great a share in them, that they may, with propriety, be called *voluntary*. They are these three,*attention, deliberation*, and*fixed purpose* or *resolution*.

Attention may be given to any object, either of sense or of ‹79› intellect, in order to form a distinct notion of it, or to discover its nature, its attributes, or its relations. And so great is the effect of attention, that, without it, it is impossible to acquire or retain a distinct notion of any object of thought.

If a man hear a discourse without attention, what does he carry away with him? If he see St Peter's or the Vatican without attention, What account can he give of it? While two persons are engaged in interesting discourse, the clock strikes within their hearing, to which they give no attention, What is the consequence? The next minute they know not whether the clock struck or not. Yet their ears were not shut. The usual impression was made upon the organ of hearing, and upon the auditory nerve and brain; but from inattention the sound either was not perceived, or passed in the twinkling of an eye, without leaving the least vestige in the memory.

A man sees not what is before his eyes when his mind is occupied about another object. In the tumult of a battle a man may be shot through

on the Difference between the Relation of Motive and Action, and that of Cause and Effect, in Physics: On Physical and Mathematical Principles', in Reid's *Correspondence*, p. 248.

the body without knowing any thing of the matter, till he discover it by the loss of blood or of strength.

The most acute sensation of pain may be deadened, if the attention can be vigorously directed to another object. A gentleman of my acquaintance, in the agony of a fit of the gout, used to call for the chess-board. As he was fond of that game, he acknowledged that, as the game advanced and drew his attention, the sense of pain abated, and the time seemed much shorter.

ARCHIMEDES, it is said, being intent upon a mathematical proposition, when Syracuse was taken by the Romans, knew not the calamity of the city, till a Roman soldier broke in upon his ‹80› retirement, and gave him a deadly wound; on which he lamented only that he had lost a fine demonstration.[15]

It is needless to multiply instances to shew, that when one faculty of the mind is intensely engaged about any object, the other faculties are laid as it were fast asleep.

It may be farther observed, that if there be any thing that can be called *genius* in matters of mere judgment and reasoning, it seems to consist chiefly in being able to give that attention to the subject which keeps it steady in the mind, till we can survey it accurately on all sides.

There is a talent of imagination, which bounds from earth to heaven, and from heaven to earth in a moment. This may be favourable to wit and imagery; but the powers of judging and reasoning depend chiefly upon keeping the mind to a clear and steady view of the subject.

Sir ISAAC NEWTON, to one who complimented him upon the force of genius, which had made such improvements in mathematics and natural philosophy, is said to have made this reply, which was both modest and judicious, That, if he had made any improvements in those sciences, it was owing more to patient attention than to any other talent.[16]

Whatever be the effects which attention may produce, (and I apprehend they are far beyond what is commonly believed,) it is for the most part in our power.

Every man knows that he can turn his attention to this subject or to that, for a longer or a shorter time, and with more or less intenseness, as he pleases. It is a voluntary act, and depends upon his will.

15. See Plutarch, *Lives*, ‘Marcellus’, though Plutarch has it that Archimedes (*c.* 287–*c.* 212 BCE) made his lament before being put to the sword.
16. *Four Letters from Sir Isaac Newton to Doctor Bentley. Containing some Arguments in Proof of a Deity*, pp. 1–2.

But what was before observed of the will in general, is appli‹81›cable to this particular exertion of it, That the mind is rarely in a state of indifference, left to turn its attention to the object which to reason appears most deserving of it. There is, for the most part, a bias to some particular object, more than to any other; and this not from any judgment of its deserving our attention more, but from some impulse or propensity, grounded on nature or habit.

It is well known that things new and uncommon, things grand, and things that are beautiful, draw our attention, not in proportion to the interest we have, or think we have in them, but in a much greater pro portion.

Whatever moves our passions or affections draws our attention, very often, more than we wish.

You desire a man not to think of an unfortunate event which torments him. It admits of no remedy. The thought of it answers no purpose but to keep the wound bleeding. He is perfectly convinced of all you say. He knows that he would not feel the affliction, if he could only not think of it; yet he hardly thinks of any thing else. Strange! when happiness and misery stand before him, and depend upon his choice, he chuses misery, and rejects happiness with his eyes open!

Yet he wishes to be happy, as all men do. How shall we reconcile this contradiction between his judgment and his conduct?

The account of it seems to me to be this: The afflicting event draws his attention so strongly, by a natural and blind force, that he either hath not the power, or hath not the vigour, of mind to resist its impulse, though he knows that to yield to it is misery, without any good to balance it.

‹82› Acute bodily pain draws our attention, and makes it very difficult to attend to any thing else, even when attention to the pain serves no other purpose but to aggravate it tenfold.

The man who played a game at chess in the agony of the gout, to engage his attention to another object, acted the reasonable part, and consulted his real happiness; but it required a great effort to give that attention to his game, which was necessary to produce the effect intended by it.

Even when there is no particular object that draws away our attention, there is a desultoriness of thought in man, and in some more than in others, which makes it very difficult to give that fixed attention to important objects which reason requires.

It appears, I think, from what has been said, that the attention we give

to objects, is for the most part voluntary: That a great part of wisdom and virtue consists in giving a proper direction to our attention; and that however reasonable this appears to the judgment of every man, yet, in some cases, it requires an effort of self-command no less than the most heroic virtues.

Another operation that may be called *voluntary*, is deliberation about what we are to do or to forbear.

Every man knows that it is in his power to deliberate or not to deliberate about any part of his conduct; to deliberate for a shorter, or a longer time, more carelessly, or more seriously: And when he has reason to suspect that his affection may bias his judgment, he may either honestly use the best means in his power to form an impartial judgment, or he may yield to his bias, and only seek arguments to justify what inclination leads him to do. In all these points, he determines, he wills, the right or the wrong.

‹83› The general rules of deliberation are perfectly evident to reason when we consider them abstractly. They are axioms in morals.

We ought not to deliberate in cases that are perfectly clear. No man deliberates whether he ought to chuse happiness or misery. No honest man deliberates whether he shall steal his neighbour's property. When the case is not clear, when it is of importance, and when there is time for deliberation, we ought to deliberate with more or less care, in proportion to the importance of the action. In deliberation we ought to weigh things in an even balance, and to allow to every consideration the weight which, in sober judgment, we think it ought to have, and no more. This is to deliberate impartially. Our deliberation should be brought to an issue in due time, so that we may not lose the opportunity of acting while we deliberate.

The axioms of Euclid do not appear to me to have a greater degree of self-evidence, than these rules of deliberation. And as far as a man acts according to them, his heart approves of him, and he has confidence of the approbation of the Searcher of hearts.[17]

But though the manner in which we ought to deliberate be evident to reason, it is not always easy to follow it. Our appetites, our affections and passions, oppose all deliberation, but that which is employed in finding the means of their gratification. Avarice may lead to deliberate upon the

17. A common heading for Psalm 139. Cf. John 8:27.

ways of making money, but it does not distinguish between the honest and the dishonest.

We ought surely to deliberate how far every appetite and passion may be indulged, and what limits should be set to it. But our appetites and passions push us on to the attainment of their objects, in the shortest road, and without delay.

‹84› Thus it happens, that, if we yield to their impulse, we shall often transgress those rules of deliberation, which reason approves. In this conflict between the dictates of reason, and the blind impulse of passion, we must voluntarily determine. When we take part with our reason, though in opposition to passion, we approve of our own conduct.

What we call a fault of ignorance, is always owing to the want of due deliberation. When we do not take due pains to be rightly informed, there is a fault, not indeed in acting according to the light we have, but in not using the proper means to get light. For if we judge wrong, after using the proper means of information, there is no fault in acting according to that wrong judgment; the error is invincible.

The natural consequence of deliberation on any part of our conduct, is a determination how we shall act; and if it is not brought to this issue it is lost labour.

There are two cases in which a determination may take place; when the opportunity of putting it in execution is present, and when it is at a distance.

When the opportunity is present, the determination to act is immediately followed by the action. Thus, if a man determine to rise and walk, he immediately does it, unless he is hindered by force, or has lost the power of walking. And if he sit still when he has power to walk, we conclude infallibly that he has not determined, or willed to walk immediately.

Our determination or will to act, is not always the result of deliberation, it may be the effect of some passion or appetite, without any judgment interposed. And when judgment is interposed, we may determine and act either according to that judgment or contrary to it.

‹85› When a man sits down hungry to dine, he eats from appetite, very often without exercising his judgment at all; nature invites and he obeys the call, as the ox, or the horse, or as an infant does.

When we converse with persons whom we love or respect, we say and do civil things merely from affection or from respect. They flow spontaneously from the heart, without requiring any judgment. In such cases

we act as brute-animals do, or as children before the use of reason. We feel an impulse in our nature, and we yield to it.

When a man eats merely from appetite, he does not consider the pleasure of eating, or its tendency to health. These considerations are not in his thoughts. But we can suppose a man who eats with a view to enjoy the pleasure of eating. Such a man reasons and judges. He will take care to use the proper means of procuring an appetite. He will be a critic in tastes, and make nice discriminations. This man uses his rational faculties even in eating. And however contemptible this application of them may be, it is an exercise of which, I apprehend, brute-animals are not capable.

In like manner, a man may say or do civil things to another, not from affection, but in order to serve some end by it, or because he thinks it his duty.

To act with a view to some distant interest, or to act from a sense of duty, seems to be proper to man as a reasonable being; but to act merely from passion, from appetite, or from affection, is common to him with the brute-animals. In the last case there is no judgment required, but in the first there is.

To act against what one judges to be for his real good upon the whole, is folly. To act against what he judges to be his du ‹86›ty, is immorality. It cannot be denied that there are too many instances of both in human life. *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*, is neither an impossible, nor an unfrequent case.[18]

While a man does what he really thinks wisest and best to be done, the more his appetites, his affections and passions draw him the contrary way, the more he approves of his own conduct, and the more he is entitled to the approbation of every rational being.

The *third* operation of mind I mentioned, which may be called voluntary, is, A fixed purpose or resolution with regard to our future conduct.

This naturally takes place, when any action, or course of action, about which we have deliberated, is not immediately to be executed, the occasion of acting being at some distance.

A fixed purpose to do, some time hence, something which we believe shall then be in our power, is strictly and properly a determination of will,

18. Transl. ‘I see and approve the better; I follow the worse’: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book VII, ll. 20–1.

no less than a determination to do it instantly. Every definition of volition agrees to it. Whether the opportunity of doing what we have determined to do be present or at some distance, is an accidental circumstance which does not affect the nature of the determination, and no good reason can be assigned why it should not be called *volition* in the one case, as well as in the other. A purpose or resolution, therefore, is truly and properly an act of will.

Our purposes are of two kinds. We may call the one *particular*, the other *general*. By a *particular* purpose, I mean that which has for its object an individual action, limited to one time and place; by a *general* purpose, that of a course or train of action, intended for some general end, or regulated by some general rule.

‹87› Thus, I may purpose to go to London next winter. When the time comes, I execute my purpose, if I continue of the same mind; and the purpose, when executed, is no more. Thus it is with every particular purpose.

A general purpose may continue for life; and, after many particular actions have been done in consequence of it, may remain and regulate future actions.

Thus, a young man proposes to follow the profession of law, of medicine, or of theology. This general purpose directs the course of his reading and study. It directs him in the choice of his company and companions, and even of his diversions. It determines his travels and the place of his abode. It has influence upon his dress and manners, and a considerable effect in forming his character.

There are other fixed purposes which have a still greater effect in forming the character. I mean such as regard our moral conduct.

Suppose a man to have exercised his intellectual and moral faculties, so far as to have distinct notions of justice and injustice, and of the consequences of both, and, after due deliberation, to have formed a fixed purpose to adhere inflexibly to justice, and never to handle the wages of iniquity.

Is not this the man whom we should call a just man? We consider the moral virtues as inherent in the mind of a good man, even when there is no opportunity of exercising them. And what is it in the mind which we can call the virtue of justice, when it is not exercised? It can be nothing but a fixed purpose, or determination, to act according to the rules of justice, when there is opportunity.

‹88› The Roman law defined justice, *A steady and perpetual will to*

give to every man his due.[19] When the opportunity of doing justice is not present, this can mean nothing else than a steady purpose, which is very properly called will. Such a purpose, if it is steady, will infallibly produce just conduct; for every known transgression of justice demonstrates a change of purpose, at least for that time.

What has been said of justice, may be so easily applied to every other moral virtue, that it is unnecessary to give instances. They are all fixed purposes of acting according to a certain rule.

By this, the virtues may be easily distinguished, in thought at least, from natural affections that bear the same name. Thus, benevolence is a capital virtue, which, though not so necessary to the being of society, is entitled to a higher degree of approbation than even justice. But there is a natural affection of benevolence, common to good and bad men, to the virtuous and to the vicious. How shall these be distinguished?

In practice, indeed, we cannot distinguish them in other men, and with difficulty in ourselves; but in theory, nothing is more easy. The virtue of benevolence is a fixed purpose or resolution to do good when we have opportunity, from a conviction that it is right, and is our duty. The affection of benevolence is a propensity to do good, from natural constitution or habit, without regard to rectitude or duty.

There are good tempers and bad, which are a part of the constitution of the man, and are really involuntary, though they often lead to voluntary actions. A good natural temper is not virtue, nor is a bad one vice. Hard would it be indeed to think, that a man should be born under a decree of reprobation, because he has the misfortune of a bad natural temper.

‹89› The Physiognomist saw, in the features of SOCRATES, the signatures of many bad dispositions, which that good man acknowledged he felt within him; but the triumph of his virtue was the greater in having conquered them.[20]

In men who have not fixed rules of conduct, no self-government, the natural temper is variable by numberless accidents. The man who is full

19. Justinian, *Institutes* I.1, pr., and *Digest* I.1.x (Ulpian). In his lectures on natural jurisprudence, Reid explained justice as follows: 'The Duty we owe to our Fellow Creatures is comprehended under one General Name Justice, which is defined to be the rendering to everyone what is his due, or what is his Right. Every Right of another infers an obligation upon us to act agreeably to it and not to violate it so that to know the Rights of others is the same thing as knowing our duty towards them.' *Practical Ethics*, p. 107.
20. See Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes*, IV.xxxviii (80).

of affection and benevolence this hour, when a cross accident happens to ruffle him, or perhaps when an easterly wind blows, feels a strange revolution in his temper. The kind and benevolent affections give place to the jealous and malignant, which are as readily indulged in their turn, and for the same reason, because he feels a propensity to indulge them.

We may observe, that men who have exercised their rational powers, are generally governed in their opinions by fixed principles of belief; and men who have made the greatest advance in self-government, are governed, in their practice, by general fixed purposes. Without the former, there would be no steadiness and consistence in our belief; nor without the latter, in our conduct.

When a man is come to years of understanding, from his education, from his company, or from his study, he forms to himself a set of general principles, a creed, which governs his judgment in particular points that occur.

If new evidence is laid before him which tends to overthrow any of his received principles, it requires in him a great degree of candour and love of truth, to give it an impartial examination, and to form a new judgment. Most men, when they are fixed in their principles, upon what they account sufficient evidence, can hardly be drawn into a new and serious examination of them.

‹90› They get a habit of believing them, which is strengthened by repeated acts, and remains immoveable, even when the evidence upon which their belief was at first grounded, is forgot.

It is this that makes conversions, either from religious or political principles, so difficult.

A mere prejudice of education sticks fast, as a proposition of EUCLID does with a man who hath long ago forgot the proof. Both indeed are upon a similar footing. We rest in both, because we have long done so, and think we received them at first upon good evidence, though that evidence be quite forgot.

When we know a man's principles, we judge by them, rather than by the degree of his understanding, how he will determine in any point which is connected with them.

Thus, the judgment of most men who judge for themselves is governed by fixed principles; and, I apprehend, that the conduct of most men who have any self-government, and any consistency of conduct, is governed by fixed purposes.

A man of breeding may, in his natural temper, be proud, passionate,

revengeful, and in his morals a very bad man; yet, in good company, he can stifle every passion that is inconsistent with good breeding, and be humane, modest, complaisant, even to those whom in his heart he despises or hates. Why is this man, who can command all his passions before company, a slave to them in private? The reason is plain: He has a fixed resolution to be a man of breeding, but hath no such resolution to be a man of virtue. He hath combated his most violent passions a thousand times before he became master of them in company. The same resolution and perseverance would have given him the command of them when alone.

‹91› A fixed resolution retains its influence upon the conduct, even when the motives to it are not in view, in the same manner as a fixed principle retains its influence upon the belief, when the evidence of it is forgot. The former may be called a habit of the *will*, the latter a habit of the *understanding*. By such habits chiefly, men are governed in their opinions and in their practice.

A man who has no general fixed purposes, may be said, as POPE says of most women, (I hope unjustly) to have no character at all.[21] He will be honest, or dishonest, benevolent or malicious, compassionate or cruel, as the tide of his passions and affections drives him. This, however, I believe, is the case of but a few in advanced life, and these, with regard to conduct, the weakest and most contemptible of the species.

A man of some constancy may change his general purposes once or twice in life, seldom more. From the pursuit of pleasure in early life, he may change to that of ambition, and from ambition to avarice. But every man who uses his reason in the conduct of life, will have some end, to which he gives a preference above all others. To this he steers his course; his projects and his actions will be regulated by it. Without this, there would be no consistency in his conduct. He would be like a ship in the ocean, which is bound to no port, under no government, but left to the mercy of winds and tides.

We observed before, that there are moral rules respecting the attention we ought to give to objects and respecting our deliberations, which are no less evident than mathematical axioms. The same thing may be observed with respect to our fixed purposes, whether particular or general.

Is it not self-evident, that, after due deliberation, we ought to resolve upon that conduct, or that course of conduct, which, ‹92› to our sober

21. Alexander Pope, *Epistles to Several Persons*, Epistle II, ‘To a Lady’, l. 2.

judgment, appears to be best and most approvable? That we ought to be firm and steady in adhering to such resolutions, while we are persuaded that they are right; but open to conviction, and ready to change our course, when we have good evidence that it is wrong?

Fickleness, inconstancy, facility, on the one hand, wilfulness, inflexibility, and obstinacy, on the other, are moral qualities, respecting our purposes, which every one sees to be wrong. A manly firmness, grounded upon rational conviction, is the proper mean which every man approves and reveres.

CHAP. IV.

Corollaries.

FROM what has been said concerning the will, it appears, *first*, That, as some acts of the will are transient and momentary, so others are permanent, and may continue for a long time, or even through the whole course of our rational life.

When I will to stretch out my hand, that will is at an end as soon as the action is done. It is an act of the will which begins and ends in a moment. But when I will to attend to a mathematical proposition, to examine the demonstration, and the consequences that may be drawn from it, this will may continue for hours. It must continue as long as my attention continues; for no man attends to a mathematical proposition longer than he wills.

The same thing may be said of deliberation, with regard, either to any point of conduct, or with regard to any general ‹93› course of conduct. We will to deliberate as long as we do deliberate; and that may be for days or for weeks.

A purpose or resolution, which we have shewn to be an act of the will, may continue for a great part of life, or for the whole, after we are of age to form a resolution.

Thus, a merchant may resolve, that, after he has made such a fortune by traffic, he will give it up, and retire to a country life. He may continue this resolution for thirty or forty years, and execute it at last; but he continues it no longer than he wills, for he may at any time change his resolution.

There are therefore acts of the will which are not transient and momentary, which may continue long, and grow into a habit. This deserves the

more to be observed, because a very eminent Philosopher has advanced a contrary principle, to wit, That all the acts of the will are transient and momentary; and from that principle has drawn very important conclusions, with regard to what constitutes the moral character of man.[22]

A *second* corollary is, That nothing in a man, wherein the will is not concerned, can justly be accounted either virtuous or immoral.

That no blame can be imputed to a man for what is altogether involuntary, is so evident in itself, that no arguments can make it more evident. The practice of all criminal courts, in all enlightened nations, is founded upon it.

If it should be thought an objection to this maxim, that, by the laws of all nations, children often suffer for the crimes of parents, in which they had no hand, the answer is easy.

For, *first*, Such is the connection between parents and children, ‹94› that the punishment of a parent must hurt his children whether the law will or not. If a man is fined, or imprisoned; if he loses life, or limb, or estate, or reputation, by the hand of justice, his children suffer by necessary consequence. *Secondly,* When laws intend to appoint any punishment of innocent children for the father's crime, such laws are either unjust, or they are to be considered as acts of police, and not of jurisprudence, and are intended as an expedient to deter parents more effectually from the commission of the crime.[23] The innocent children, in this case, are sacrificed to the public good, in like manner, as, to present the spreading of the plague, the sound are shut up with the infected in a house or ship, that has the infection.

By the law of England, if a man is killed by an ox goring him, or a cart running over him, though there be no fault or neglect in the owner,

22. Reid means Hume (see 2/II/13, 1), who, though he did not describe acts of the will in precisely these terms, denied the importance of acts of will in his account of the proper objects of moral praise and blame, and argued that there is a merely verbal difference between 'moral virtues' and 'natural abilities': see *Treatise*, 3.3.4 and 5.

23. Reid operated with a common distinction between jurisprudence, which dealt with the general laws of justice, and police, which was part of politics and dealt with 'Regulations ... for Promoting Religion Virtue Education, Arts & Sciences Agriculture Trade Manufactures & for Regulating the Arms and Finances of the State and other Objects of that kind which are not essential to the being of a State or Government but conducive to its well being and Security' (*Practical Ethics*, p. 16).

the ox or the cart is a *deodand*, and is confiscated to the Church.[24] The Legislature surely did not intend to punish the ox as a criminal, far less the cart. The intention evidently was, to inspire the people with a sacred regard to the life of man.

When the Parliament of Paris, with a similar intention, ordained the house in which Ravilliac was born, to be razed to the ground, and never to be rebuilt, it would be great weakness to conclude, that the wise judicature intended to punish the house.[25]

If any judicature should, in any instance, find a man guilty, and an object of punishment, for what they allowed to be altogether involuntary, all the world would condemn them as men who knew nothing of the first and most fundamental rules of justice.

I have endeavoured to shew, that, in our attention to objects, in order to form a right judgment of them; in our deliberation about particular actions, or about general rules of conduct; in ‹95› our purposes and resolutions, as well as in the execution of them, the will has a principal share. If any man could be found, who, in the whole course of his life, had given due attention to things that concern him, had deliberated duly and impartially about his conduct, had formed his resolutions, and executed them according to his best judgment and capacity, surely such a man might hold up his face before GOD and man, and plead innocence. He must be acquitted by the impartial Judge, whatever his natural temper was, whatever his passions and affections, as far as they were involuntary.

A *third* corollary is, That all virtuous habits, when we distinguish them from virtuous actions, consist in fixed purposes of acting according to the rules of virtue, as often as we have opportunity.

We can conceive in a man a greater or a less degree of steadiness to his purposes or resolutions; but that the general tenor of his conduct should be contrary to them, is impossible.

24. Lat. *deo dandum*: to be given to God. By deodand ‘is meant whatever personal chattel is the immediate occasion of the death of any reasonable creature; which is forfeited to the king, to be applied to pious uses, and distributed in alms by his high almoner’: William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, vol. 1, p. 290.

25. François Ravaillac (1578–1610) was a Catholic fanatic who murdered King Henri IV. A popular source for the story was the Duc de Sully’s memoirs (1634), of which there were many English editions. For the episode mentioned by Reid, see *Memoirs of Maximilian Bethune, Duke of Sully*, vol. 5, p. 224

The man who has a determined resolution to do his duty in every instance, and who adheres steadily to his resolution, is a perfect man. The man who has a determined purpose of carrying on a course of action which he knows to be wrong, is a hardened offender. Between these extremes there are many intermediate degrees of virtue and vice.

‹97›

ESSAY III.

OF THE PRINCIPLES OF ACTION.

PART I.

Of the Mechanical Principles of Action.[1]

CHAP. I.

Of the Principles of Action in general.

IN the strict philosophical sense, nothing can be called the action of a man, but what he previously conceived and willed or determined to do. In morals we commonly employ the word in this sense, and never impute any thing to a man as his doing, in which his will was not interposed. But when moral imputation is not concerned, we call many things actions of the man, which he neither previously conceived nor willed. Hence the actions of men have been distinguished into three classes, the voluntary, the involuntary, and the mixed. By the last are meant such actions as are under the command of the will, but are commonly performed without any interposition of will.

We cannot avoid using the word *action* in this popular sense, without deviating too much from the common use of language; and it is in this sense we use it when we enquire into the principles of action in the human mind.

By *principles* of action, I understand every thing that incites us to act.

‹98› If there were no incitements to action, active power would be given us in vain. Having no motive to direct our active exertions, the mind would, in all cases, be in a state of perfect indifference, to do this or that, or nothing at all. The active power would either not be exerted at all,

1. Among the preparations for the three chapters that make up Part 1 of this Essay is an important paper read in some version to the Glasgow Literary Society: 2/I/8. It is one of several on the principles of action that Reid presented in sequence to the Society, one of them recorded for 11 December 1778, though we do not know which one. Cf. the opening notes to the chapters in Part 2, and Chap. 1 in Part 3 of this Essay.

or its exertions would be perfectly unmeaning and frivolous, neither wise nor foolish, neither good nor bad. To every action that is of the smallest importance, there must be some incitement, some motive, some reason.

It is therefore a most important part of the philosophy of the human mind, to have a distinct and just view of the various principles of action, which the Author of our being hath planted in our nature, to arrange them properly, and to assign to every one its rank.

By this it is, that we may discover the end of our being, and the part which is assigned us upon the theatre of life. In this part of the human constitution,[2] the noblest work of GOD that falls within our notice, we may discern most clearly the character of him who made us, and how he would have us to employ that active power which he hath given us.

I cannot without great diffidence enter upon this subject, observing that almost every author of reputation, who has given attention to it, has a system of his own; and that no man has been so happy as to give general satisfaction to those who came after him.

There is a branch of knowledge much valued, and very justly, which we call knowledge of the world, knowledge of mankind, knowledge of human nature: This, I think, consists in knowing from what principles men generally act; and it is commonly the fruit of natural sagacity joined with experience.

‹99› A man of sagacity, who has had occasion to deal in interesting matters, with a great variety of persons of different age, sex, rank and profession, learns to judge what may be expected from men in given circumstances; and how they may be most effectually induced to act the part which he desires. To know this is of so great importance to men in active life, that it is called knowing men, and knowing human nature.

This knowledge may be of considerable use to a man who would speculate upon the subject we have proposed, but is not, by itself, sufficient for that purpose.

The man of the world conjectures, perhaps with great probability, how a man will act in certain given circumstances; and this is all he wants to know. To enter into a detail of the various principles which influence the actions of men, to give them distinct names, to define them, and to ascertain their different provinces, is the business of a philosopher, and

2. This necessary comma is added by the editors, but on the authority of Reid's final manuscript (1/II/1, 36).

not of a man of the world; and, indeed, it is a matter attended with great difficulty from various causes.

First, On account of the great number of active principles that influence the actions of men.

Man has, not without reason, been called an epitome of the universe. His body, by which his mind is greatly affected, being a part of the material system, is subject to all the laws of inanimate matter. During some part of his existence, his state is very like that of a vegetable. He rises, by imperceptible degrees, to the animal, and, at last, to the rational life, and has the principles that belong to all.

Another cause of the difficulty of tracing the various principles of action in man, is, That the same action, nay, the same course and train of action may proceed from very different principles.

‹100› Men who are fond of a hypothesis, commonly seek no other proof of its truth, but that it serves to account for the appearances which it is brought to explain. This is a very slippery kind of proof in every part of philosophy, and never to be trusted; but least of all, when the appearances to be accounted for are human actions.

Most actions proceed from a variety of principles concurring in their direction; and according as we are disposed to judge favourably or unfavourably of the person, or of human nature in general, we impute them wholly to the best, or wholly to the worst, overlooking others which had no small share in them.

The principles from which men act can be discovered only in these two ways; by attention to the conduct of other men, or by attention to our own conduct, and to what we feel in ourselves. There is much uncertainty in the former, and much difficulty in the latter.

Men differ much in their characters; and we can observe the conduct of a few only of the species. Men differ not only from other men, but from themselves at different times, and on different occasions; according as they are in the company of their superiors, inferiors, or equals; according as they are in the eye of strangers, or of their familiars only, or in the view of no human eye; according as they are in good or bad fortune, or in good or bad humour. We see but a small part of the actions of our most familiar acquaintance; and what we see may lead us to a probable conjecture, but can give no certain knowledge of the principles from which they act.

A man may, no doubt, know with certainty the principles from which he himself acts, because he is conscious of them. But this knowledge requires an attentive reflection upon the operations of his own mind,

which is very rarely to be found. ‹101› It is perhaps more easy to find a man who has formed a just notion of the character of man in general, or of those of his familiar acquaintance, than one who has a just notion of his own character.

Most men, through pride and self-flattery, are apt to think themselves better than they really are; and some, perhaps from melancholy, or from false principles of religion, are led to think themselves worse than they really are.

It requires, therefore, a very accurate and impartial examination of a man's own heart, to be able to form a distinct notion of the various principles which influence his conduct. That this is a matter of great difficulty, we may judge from the very different and contradictory systems of Philosophers upon this subject, from the earliest ages to this day.

During the age of Greek Philosophy, the Platonist, the Peripatetic, the Stoic, the Epicurean, had each his own system. In the dark ages, the Schoolmen and the Mystics had systems diametrically opposite; [3] and since the revival of learning, no controversy hath been more keenly agitated, especially among British Philosophers, than that about the principles of action in the human constitution.

They have determined, to the satisfaction of the learned, the forces by which the planets and comets traverse the boundless regions of space; but have not been able to determine, with any degree of unanimity, the forces which every man is conscious of in himself, and by which his conduct is directed.

Some admit no principle but self-love; others resolve all into love of the pleasures of sense, variously modified by the association of ideas; others admit disinterested benevolence along with self-love; others reduce all to reason and passion; others to pas ‹102›sion alone; nor is there less variety about the number and distribution of the passions.

The names we give to the various principles of action, have so little precision, even in the best and purest writers in every language, that, on this account, there is no small difficulty in giving them names, and arranging them properly.

The words *appetite*, *passion*, *affection*, *interest*, *reason*, cannot be said to have one definite signification. They are taken sometimes in a larger, and sometimes in a more limited sense. The same principle is sometimes

3. In *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* II Chap. 7, p. 107, Reid makes it clear that by mysticism he meant the adoption by parts of Christianity of Alexandrian philosophy, but he mentions no names; cf. ibid., Chap. 8, p. 114.

called by one of those names, sometimes by another; and principles of a very different nature are often called by the same name.

To remedy this confusion of names, it might perhaps seem proper to invent new ones. But there are so few entitled to this privilege, that I shall not lay claim to it; but shall endeavour to class the various principles of human action as distinctly as I am able, and to point out their specific differences; giving them such names as may deviate from the common use of the words as little as possible.

There are some principles of action which require no attention, no deliberation, no will. These, for distinction's sake, we shall call *mechanical*. Another class we may call *animal*, as they seem common to man with other animals. A third class we may call *rational*, being proper to man as a rational creature.

‹103›

CHAP. II.

Instinct.

THE mechanical principles of action may, I think, be reduced to two species, *instincts* and *habits*.

By instinct, I mean a natural blind impulse to certain actions, without having any end in view, without deliberation, and very often without any conception of what we do.

Thus a man breathes while he is alive, by the alternate contraction and relaxation of certain muscles, by which the chest, and of consequence the lungs, are contracted and dilated. There is no reason to think, that an infant new-born, knows that breathing is necessary to life in its new state, that he knows how it must be performed, or even that he has any thought or conception of that operation; yet he breathes as soon as he is born with perfect regularity, as if he had been taught, and got the habit by long practice.

By the same kind of principle, a new-born child, when its stomach is emptied, and nature has brought milk into the mother's breast, sucks and swallows its food as perfectly as if it knew the principles of that operation, and had got the habit of working according to them.

Sucking and swallowing are very complex operations. Anatomists describe about thirty pairs of muscles that must be employed in every draught. Of those muscles, every one must be served by its proper nerve,

and can make no exertion but by some influence communicated by the nerve. The exertion of all those muscles and nerves is not simultaneous. They must ‹104› succeed each other in a certain order, and their order is no less necessary than the exertion itself.

This regular train of operations is carried on according to the nicest rules of art, by the infant, who has neither art, not science, nor experience, nor habit.

That the infant feels the uneasy sensation of hunger, I admit; and that it sucks no longer than till this sensation be removed. But who informed it that this uneasy sensation might be removed, or by what means? That it knows nothing of this is evident; for it will as readily suck a finger, or a bit of stick, as the nipple.

By a like principle it is, that infants cry when they are pained or hurt; that they are afraid when left alone, especially in the dark; that they start when in danger of falling; that they are terrified by an angry countenance, or an angry tone of voice, and are soothed and comforted by a placid countenance, and by soft and gentle tones of voice.

In the animals we are best acquainted with, and which we look upon as the more perfect of the brute-creation, we see much the same instincts as in the human kind, or very similar ones, suited to the particular state and manner of life of the animal.

Besides these, there are in brute-animals instincts peculiar to each tribe, by which they are fitted for defence, for offence, or for providing for themselves, and for their offspring.

It is not more certain, that nature hath furnished various animals with various weapons of offence and defence, than that the same nature hath taught them how to use them; the bull and the ram to butt, the horse to kick, the dog to bite, the‹105› lion to use his paws, the boar his tusks, the serpent his fangs, and the bee and wasp their sting.

The manufactures of animals, if we may call them by that name, present us with a wonderful variety of instincts, belonging to particular species, whether of the social or of the solitary kind; the nests of birds, so similar in their situation and architecture in the same kind, so various in different kinds; the webs of spiders, and of other spinning animals; the ball of the silk-worm; the nest of ants and other mining animals; the combs of wasps, hornets and bees; the dams and houses of beavers.

The instinct of animals is one of the most delightful and instructive parts of a most pleasant study, that of natural history; and deserves to be more cultivated than it has yet been.

Every manufacturing art among men was invented by some man, improved by others, and brought to perfection by time and experience. Men learn to work in it by long practice, which produces a habit. The arts of men vary in every age, and in every nation, and are found only in those who have been taught them.

The manufactures of animals differ from those of men in many striking particulars.

No animal of the species can claim the invention. No animal ever introduced any new improvement, or any variation from the former practice. Every one of the species has equal skill from the beginning, without teaching, without experience or habit. Every one has its art by a kind of inspiration. I do not mean that it is inspired with the principles or rules of the art, but with the ability and inclination of working in it to perfection, without any knowledge of its principles, rules or end.

‹106› The more sagacious animals may be taught to do many things which they do not by instinct. What they are taught to do, they do with more or less skill, according to their sagacity and their training. But, in their own arts, they need no teaching nor training, nor is the art ever improved or lost. Bees gather their honey and their wax, they fabricate their combs and rear their young at this day, neither better nor worse than they did when VIRGIL so sweetly sung their works.[4]

The work of every animal is indeed like the works of nature, perfect in its kind, and can bear the most critical examination of the mechanic or the mathematician. One example from the animal last mentioned may serve to illustrate this.

Bees, it is well known, construct their combs with small cells on both sides, fit both for holding their store of honey, and for rearing their young. There are only three possible figures of the cells, which can make them all equal and similar, without any useless interstices. These are the equilateral triangle, the square, and the regular hexagon.

It is well known to mathematicians, that there is not a fourth way possible, in which a plane may be cut into little spaces that shall be equal, similar and regular, without leaving any interstices. Of the three, the hexagon is the most proper, both for conveniency and strength. Bees, as if they knew this, make their cells regular hexagons.

As the combs have cells on both sides, the cells may either be exactly opposite, having partition against partition, or the bottom of a cell may

4. Virgil treats of beekeeping in *Georgics*, Book IV.

rest upon the partitions between the cells on the other side, which will serve as a buttress to strengthen it. The last way is best for strength; accordingly, the bottom of each cell rests against the point where three partitions meet on the other side, which gives it all the strength possible.

‹107› The bottom of a cell may either be one plane perpendicular to the side-partitions, or it may be composed of several planes, meeting in a solid angle in the middle point. It is only in one of these two ways, that all the cells can be similar without losing room. And, for the same intention, the planes of which the bottom is composed, if there be more than one, must be three in number, and neither more nor fewer.

It has been demonstrated, that, by making the bottoms of the cells to consist of three planes meeting in a point, there is a saving of material and labour no way inconsiderable. The bees, as if acquainted with these principles of solid geometry, follow them most accurately; the bottom of each cell being composed of three planes which make obtuse angles with the side-partitions, and with one another, and meet in a point in the middle of the bottom; the three angles of this bottom being supported by three partitions on the other side of the comb, and the point of it by the common intersection of those three partitions.

One instance more of the mathematical skill displayed in the structure of a honey-comb deserves to be mentioned.

It is a curious mathematical problem, at what precise angle the three planes which compose the bottom of a cell ought to meet, in order to make the greatest possible saving, or the least expence, of material and labour.

This is one of those problems, belonging to the higher parts of mathematics, which are called problems of *maxima* and *minima*. It has been resolved by some mathematicians, particularly by the ingenious Mr MACLAURIN, by a fluxionary calculation, which is to be found in the Transactions of the Royal Society of London. He has determined precisely the angle required; and he found, by the most exact mensuration the subject could ‹108› admit, that it is the very angle, in which the three planes in the bottom of the cell of a honey-comb do actually meet.[5]

Shall we ask here, who taught the bee the properties of solids, and to resolve problems of *maxima* and *minima*? If a honeycomb were a work

5. Colin Maclaurin, ‘Of the Bases of the Cells wherein the Bees deposite their Honey’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 42 (1742–3): pp. 565–71.

of human art, every man of common sense would conclude, without hesitation, that he who invented the construction, must have understood the principles on which it is constructed.

We need not say that bees know none of these things. They work most geometrically, without any knowledge of geometry; somewhat like a child, who, by turning the handle of an organ, makes good music, without any knowledge of music.

The art is not in the child, but in him who made the organ. In like manner, when a bee makes its combs so geometrically, the geometry is not in the bee, but in that great Geometrician who made the bee, and made all things in number, weight and measure.[6]

To return to instincts in man; those are most remarkable which appear in infancy, when we are ignorant of every thing necessary to our preservation, and therefore must perish, if we had not an invisible Guide, who leads us blind-fold in the way we should take, if we had eyes to see it.

Besides the instincts which appear only in infancy, and are intended to supply the want of understanding in that early period, there are many which continue through life, and which supply the defects of our intellectual powers in every period. Of these we may observe three classes.

First, There are many things necessary to be done for our pre‹109›servation, which, even when we will to do, we know not the means by which they must be done.

A man knows that he must swallow his food before it can nourish him. But this action requires the co-operation of many nerves and muscles, of which he knows nothing; and if it were to be directed solely by his understanding and will, he would starve before he learned how to perform it.

Here instinct comes in to his aid. He needs do no more than will to swallow. All the requisite motions of nerves and muscles immediately take place in their proper order, without his knowing or willing any thing about them.

If we ask here, whose will do these nerves and muscles obey? Not his, surely, to whom they belong. He knows neither their names, nor nature, nor office; he never thought of them. They are moved by some impulse, of which the cause is unknown, without any thought, will or intention on his part, that is, they are moved instinctively.

This is the case, in some degree, in every voluntary motion of our body. Thus, I will to stretch out my arm. The effect immediately follows.

6. Reid quotes from the Apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 11:20.

But we know that the arm is stretched out by the contraction of certain muscles; and that the muscles are contracted by the influence of the nerves. I know nothing, I think nothing, either of nerves or muscles, when I stretch out my arm; yet this nervous influence, and this contraction of the muscles, uncalled by me, immediately produce the effect which I willed. This is, as if a weight were to be raised, which can be raised only by a complication of levers, pullies, and other mechanical powers, that are behind the curtain, and altogether unknown to me. I will to raise the weight; and no sooner is this volition exerted, than the machinery behind the curtain falls to work and raises the weight.

‹110› If such a case should happen, we would conclude, that there is some person behind the curtain, who knew my will, and put the machine in motion to execute it.

The case of my wiling to stretch out my arm, or to swallow my food, has evidently a great similarity to this. But who it is that stands behind the curtain, and sets the internal machinery a-going, is hid from us; so strangely and wonderfully are we made. This, however, is evident, that those internal motions are not willed nor intended by us, and therefore are instinctive.

A *second* case in which we have need of instinct, even in advanced life, is, When the action must be so frequently repeated, that to intend and will it every time it is done, would occupy too much of our thought, and leave no room for other necessary employments of the mind.

We must breathe often every minute whether awake or asleep. We must often close the eye-lids, in order to preserve the lustre of the eye. If these things required particular attention and volition every time they are done, they would occupy all our thought. Nature therefore gives an impulse to do them as often as is necessary, without any thought at all. They consume no time, they give not the least interruption to any exercise of the mind; because they are done by instinct.

A *third* case, in which we need the aid of instinct, is, When the action must be done so suddenly, that there is no time to think and determine. When a man loses his balance, either on foot or on horseback, he makes an instantaneous effort to recover it by instinct. The effort would be in vain, if it waited the determination of reason and will.

When anything threatens our eyes, we wink hard, by instinct, and can hardly avoid doing so, even when we know that the‹111› stroke is aimed in jest, and that we are perfectly safe from danger. I have seen this tried upon a wager, which a man was to gain if he could keep his eyes open,

while another aimed a stroke at them in jest. The difficulty of doing this shews that there may be a struggle between instinct and will; and that it is not easy to resist the impulse of instinct, even by a strong resolution not to yield to it.

Thus the merciful Author of our nature, hath adapted our instincts to the defects, and to the weakness of our understanding. In infancy we are ignorant of every thing; yet many things must be done by us for our preservation: These are done by instinct. When we grow up there are many motions of our limbs and bodies necessary, which can be per - formed only by a curious and complex internal machinery; a machinery of which the bulk of mankind are totally ignorant, and which the most skilful anatomist knows but imperfectly. All this machinery is set a-going by instinct. We need only to will the external motion, and all the internal motions, previously necessary to the effect, take place of themselves, without our will or command.

Some actions must be so often repeated, through the whole of life, that, if they required attention and will, we should be able to do nothing else: These go on regularly by instinct.

Our preservation from danger often requires such sudden exertions, that there is no time to think and to determine: Accordingly, we make such exertions by instinct.

Another thing in the nature of man, which I take to be partly, though not wholly, instinctive, is his proneness to imitation.

ARISTOTLE observed, long ago, that man is an imitative animal.[7] He is so in more respects than one. He is disposed ‹112› to imitate what he approves. In all arts men learn more, and more agreeably, by example than by rules. Imitation by the chissel, by the pencil, by description prosaic and poetical, and by action and gesture, have been favourite and elegant entertainments of the whole species. In all these cases, however, the imitation is intended and willed, and therefore cannot be said to be instinctive.

But, I apprehend, that human nature disposes us to the imitation of those among whom we live, when we neither desire nor will it.

Let an Englishman, of middle age, take up his residence in Edinburgh or Glasgow; although he has not the least intention to use the Scots dialect, but a firm resolution to preserve his own pure and unmixed, he will find it very difficult to make good his intention. He will, in a course

7. See *Poetics*, Book IV, 1448b.

of years, fall insensibly, and without intention, into the tone and accent, and even into the words and phrases of those he converses with; and nothing can preserve him from this, but a strong disgust to every Scoticism, which perhaps may overcome the natural instinct.

It is commonly thought that children often learn to stammer by imitation; yet I believe no person ever desired or willed to learn that quality.

I apprehend that instinctive imitation has no small influence in forming the peculiarities of provincial dialects, the peculiarities of voice, gesture, and manner, which we see in some families, the manners peculiar to different ranks, and different professions; and perhaps even in forming national characters, and the human character in general.

The instances that history furnishes of wild men, brought up from early years, without the society of any of their own spe‹113›cies are so few that we cannot build conclusions upon them with great certainty. But all I have heard of agreed in this, that the wild man gave but very slender indications of the rational faculties; and, with regard to his mind, was hardly distinguishable from the more sagacious of the brutes.

There is a considerable part of the lowest rank in every nation, of whom it cannot be said that any pains have been taken by themselves, or by others, to cultivate their understanding, or to form their manners; yet we see an immense difference between them and the wild man.

This difference is wholly the effect of society; and, I think, it is in a great measure, though not wholly, the effect of undesigned and instinctive imitation.

Perhaps, not only our actions, but even our judgment, and belief, is, in some cases, guided by instinct, that is, by a natural and blind impulse.

When we consider man as a rational creature, it may seem right that he should have no belief but what is grounded upon evidence, probable or demonstrative; and it is, I think, commonly taken for granted, that it is always evidence, real or apparent, that determines our belief.

If this be so, the consequence is, That, in no case, can there be any belief, till we find evidence, or, at least, what to our judgment appears to be evidence. I suspect it is not so; but that, on the contrary, before we grow up to the full use of our rational faculties, we do believe, and must believe, many things without any evidence at all.

The faculties which we have in common with brute-animals, are of earlier growth than reason. We are irrational animals ‹114› for a considerable time before we can properly be called rational. The operations

of reason spring up by imperceptible degrees; nor is it possible for us to trace accurately the order in which they rise. The power of reflection, by which only we could trace the progress of our growing faculties, comes too late to answer that end. Some operations of brute-animals look so like reason, that they are not easily distinguished from it. Whether brutes have anything that can properly be called belief, I cannot say; but their actions shew something that looks very like it.

If there be any instinctive belief in man, it is probably of the same kind with that which we ascribe to brutes, and may be specifically different from that rational belief which is grounded on evidence; but that there is something in man which we call belief, which is not grounded on evidence, I think, must be granted.

We need to be informed of many things before we are capable of discerning the evidence on which they rest. Were our belief to be withheld till we are capable, in any degree, of weighing evidence, we should lose all the benefit of that instruction and information, without which we could never attain the use of our rational faculties.

Man would never acquire the use of reason if he were not brought up in the society of reasonable creatures. The benefit he receives from society, is derived partly from imitation of what he sees others do, partly from the instruction and information they communicate to him, without which he could neither be preserved from destruction, nor acquire the use of his rational powers.

Children have a thousand things to learn, and they learn many things every day; more than will be easily believed by those who have never given attention to their progress.

‹115› *Oportet discentem credere* is a common adage. [8] Children have every thing to learn; and, in order to learn, they must believe their instructors. They need a greater stock of faith from infancy to twelve or fourteen, than ever after. But how shall they get this stock so necessary to them? If their faith depend upon evidence, the stock of evidence, real or apparent, must bear proportion to their faith. But such, in reality, is their situation, that when their faith must be greatest, the evidence is least. They believe a thousand things before they ever spend a thought upon

8. Transl. ‘The learner should take things on trust’, Aristotle, *Sophistici Elenchi*, Book II, 165b3. The maxim was frequently quoted, notably in Francis Bacon’s *The Advancement of Learning*, Book 1, in *Major Works*, p. 144.

evidence. Nature supplies the want of evidence, and gives them an instinctive kind of faith without evidence.

They believe implicitly whatever they are told, and receive with assurance the testimony of every one, without ever thinking of a reason why they should do so.

A parent or a master might command them to believe; but in vain; for belief is not in our power; but in the first part of life, it is governed by mere testimony in matters of fact, and by mere authority in all other matters, no less than by evidence in riper years.

It is not the words of the testifier, but his belief, that produces this belief in a child: For children soon learn to distinguish what is said in jest, from what is said in good earnest. What appears to them to be said in jest, produces no belief. They glory in shewing that they are not to be imposed on. When the signs of belief in the speaker are ambiguous, it is pleasant to observe with what sagacity they pry into his features, to discern whether he really believes what he says, or only counterfeits belief. As soon as this point is determined, their belief is regulated by his. If he be doubtful, they are doubtful, if he be assured, they are also assured.

It is well known what a deep impression religious principles ‹116› zealously inculcated make upon the minds of children. The absurdities of ghosts and hobgoblins early impressed, have been known to stick so fast, even in enlightened minds, as to baffle all rational conviction.

When we grow up to the use of reason, testimony attended with certain circumstances, or even authority, may afford a rational ground of belief; but with children, without any regard to circumstances, either of them operates like demonstration. And as they seek no reason, nor can give any reason, for this regard to testimony and to authority, it is the effect of a natural impulse, and may be called instinct.

Another instance of belief which appears to be instinctive, is that which children shew even in infancy, that an event which they have observed in certain circumstances, will happen again in like circumstances. A child of half a year old, who has once burned his finger by putting it in the candle, will not put it there again. And if you make a shew of putting it in the candle by force, you see the most manifest signs that he believes he shall meet with the same calamity.

Mr HUME hath shewn very clearly, that this belief is not the effect either of reason or experience. He endeavours to account for it by the association of ideas. Though I am not satisfied with his account of this phænomenon, I shall not now examine it; because it is sufficient for the

present argument, that this belief is not grounded on evidence, real or apparent, which I think he clearly proves.[9]

A person who has lived so long in the world, as to observe that nature is governed by fixed laws, may have some rational ground to expect similar events in similar circumstances; but this cannot be the case of the child. His belief therefore is not grounded on evidence. It is the result of his constitution.

‹117› Nor is it the less so, though it should arise from the association of ideas. For what is called the association of ideas is a law of nature in our constitution; which produces its effects without any operation of reason on our part, and in a manner of which we are entirely ignorant.

CHAP. III.

Of Habit.

HABIT differs from instinct, not in its nature, but in its origin; the latter being natural, the former acquired. Both operate without will or intention, without thought, and therefore may be called *mechanical principles*.

Habit is commonly defined, *A facility of doing a thing, acquired by having done it frequently*. This definition is sufficient for habits of art; but the habits which may, with propriety, be called principles of action, must give more than a facility, they must give an inclination or impulse to do the action; and that, in many cases, habits have this force, cannot be doubted.

How many aukward habits, by frequenting improper company, are children apt to learn, in their address, motion, looks, gesture and pronunciation. They acquire such habits commonly from an undesigned and instinctive imitation, before they can judge of what is proper and becoming.

When they are a little advanced in understanding, they may easily be convinced that such a thing is unbecoming, they may resolve to forbear it, but when the habit is formed, such a general resolution is not of itself sufficient; for the habit will operate without intention; and particular attention is necessary, on ‹118› every occasion, to resist its impulse, until it be undone by the habit of opposing it.

9. See *Treatise*, 1.3.8.13–14: SBN 103–5. For Reid's examination of Hume's argument, see *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* 6.5: pp. 489–90.

It is owing to the force of habits, early acquired by imitation, that a man who has grown up to manhood in the lowest rank of life, if fortune raise him to a higher rank, very rarely acquires the air and manners of a gentleman.

When to that instinctive imitation, which I spoke of before, we join the force of habit, it is easy to see, that these mechanical principles have no small share in forming the manners and character of most men.

The difficulty of overcoming vicious habits has, in all ages, been a common topic of theologians and moralists; and we see too many sad examples to permit us to doubt of it.

There are good habits, in a moral sense, as well as bad; and it is certain, that the stated and regular performance of what we approve, not only makes it easy, but makes us uneasy in the omission of it. This is the case, even when the action derives all its goodness from the opinion of the performer. A good illiterate Roman Catholic does not sleep sound if he goes to bed without telling his beads, and repeating prayers which he does not understand.

ARISTOTLE makes wisdom, prudence, good sense, science and art, as well as the moral virtues and vices, to be *habits*.[10] If he meant no more, by giving this name to all those intellectual and moral qualities, than that they are all strengthened and confirmed by repeated acts, this is undoubtedly true. I take the word in a less extensive sense, when I consider habits as principles of action. I conceive it to be a part of our constitution, that what we have been accustomed to do, we acquire, not only a facility, but a proneness to do on like occasions; so that it requires a ‹119› particular will and effort to forbear it, but to do it, requires very often no will at all. We are carried by habit as by a stream in swimming, if we make no resistance.

Every art furnishes examples both of the power of habits and of their utility; no one more than the most common of all arts, the art of speaking.

Articulate language is spoken, not by nature, but by art. It is no easy matter to children, to learn the simple sounds of language; I mean, to learn to pronounce the vowels and consonants. It would be much more difficult, if they were not led by instinct to imitate the sounds they hear; for the difficulty is vastly greater of teaching the deaf to pronounce the letters and words, though experience shows that it can be done.

10. See *Nicomachean Ethics* II.1, 1103a14–19.

What is it that makes this pronunciation so easy at last which was so difficult at first? It is habit.

But from what cause does it happen, that a good speaker no sooner conceives what he would express, than the letters, syllables and words arrange themselves according to innumerable rules of speech, while he never thinks of these rules? He means to express certain sentiments; in order to do this properly, a selection must be made of the materials, out of many thousands. He makes this selection without any expence of time or thought. The materials selected must be arranged in a particular order, according to innumerable rules of grammar, logic and rhetoric, and accompanied with a particular tone and emphasis. He does all this as it were by inspiration, without thinking of any of these rules, and without breaking one of them.

This art, if it were not more common, would appear more wonderful, than that a man should dance blind-fold amidst a‹120› thousand burning plough-shares, without being burnt; yet all this may be done by habit.

It appears evident, that as, without instinct, the infant could not live to become a man, so, without habit, man would remain an infant through life, and would be as helpless, as unhandy, as speechless, and as much a child in understanding at threescore as at three.

I see no reason to think, that we shall ever be able to assign the physical cause, either of instinct, or of the power of habit.

Both seem to be parts of our original constitution. Their end and use is evident; but we can assign no cause of them, but the will of him who made us.

With regard to instinct, which is a natural propensity, this will perhaps be easily granted; but it is no less true with regard to that power and inclination which we acquire by habit.

No man can shew a reason why our doing a thing frequently should produce either facility or inclination to do it.

The fact is so notorious, and so constantly in our eye, that we are apt to think no reason should be sought for it, any more than why the sun shines. But there must be a cause of the sun's shining, and there must be a cause of the power of habit.

We see nothing analogous to it in inanimate matter, or in things made by human art. A clock or a watch, a waggon or a plough, by the custom of going, does not learn to go better, or require less moving force. The earth does not increase in fertility by the custom of bearing crops.

It is said, that trees and other vegetables, by growing long in ‹121› an

unkindly soil or climate, sometimes acquire qualities by which they can bear its inclemency with less hurt. This, in the vegetable kingdom, has some resemblance to the power of habit; but, in inanimate matter, I know nothing that resembles it.

A stone loses nothing of its weight by being long supported, or made to move upward. A body, by being tossed about ever so long, or ever so violently, loses nothing of its *inertia*, nor acquires the least disposition to change its state.

ESSAY III.

PART II.[11]

Of Animal Principles of Action

CHAP. I.

Of Appetites.

HAVING discoursed of the *mechanical* principles of action, I proceed to consider those I called *animal*.

They are such as operate upon the will and intention, but do not suppose any exercise of judgment or reason; and are most of them to be found in some brute-animals, as well as in man.

In this class, the first kind I shall call *appetites*, taking that word in a stricter sense than it is sometimes taken, even by good writers.

‹122› The word *appetite* is sometimes limited, so as to signify only the desire of food when we hunger; sometimes it is extended so as to signify any strong desire, whatever be its object. Without pretending to censure any use of the word which custom hath authorised, I beg leave to limit it to a particular class of desires, which are distinguished from all others by the following marks.

First, Every appetite is accompanied with an uneasy sensation proper to it, which is strong or weak, in proportion to the desire we have of the object. *Secondly*, Appetites are not constant, but periodical, being sated by their objects for a time, and returning after certain periods. Such is the nature of those principles of action, to which I beg leave, in this Essay, to appropriate the name of *appetites*. Those that are chiefly observable in man, as well as in most other animals, are hunger, thirst, and lust.

If we attend to the appetite of hunger, we shall find in it two ingredients, an uneasy sensation and a desire to eat. The desire keeps pace with the sensation, and ceases when it ceases. When a man is sated with eating, both the uneasy sensation and the desire to eat cease for a time, and return after a certain interval. So it is with other appetites.

In infants, for some time after they come into the world, the uneasy

11. Part II of this Essay was prepared in a sequence of four papers to the Glasgow Literary Society; cf. above note 1 to Part I, Chap. 1 of this Essay. For the first two chapters, see 2/I/9.

sensation of hunger is probably the whole. We cannot suppose in them, before experience, any conception of eating, nor, consequently, any desire of it. They are led by mere instinct to suck when they feel the sensation of hunger. But when experience has connected, in their imagination, the uneasy sensation with the means of removing it, the desire of the last comes to be so associated with the first, that they remain through life inseparable: And we give the name of *hunger* to the principle that is made up of both.

‹123› That the appetite of hunger includes the two ingredients I have mentioned will not, I apprehend, be questioned. I take notice of it the rather because we may, if I mistake not, find a similar composition in other principles of action. They are made up of different ingredients, and may be analyzed into the parts that enter into their composition.

If one Philosopher should maintain, that hunger is an uneasy sensation, another, that it is a desire to eat, they seem to differ widely; for a desire and a sensation are very different things, and have no similitude. But they are both in the right; for hunger includes both an uneasy sensation and a desire to eat.

Although there has been no such dispute among Philosophers as we have supposed with regard to hunger, yet there have been similar disputes with regard to other principles of action; and it deserves to be considered whether they may not be terminated in a similar manner.

The ends for which our natural appetites are given, are too evident to escape the observation of any man of the least reflection. Two of those I named are intended for the preservation of the individual, and the third for the continuance of the species.

The reason of mankind would be altogether insufficient for these ends, without the direction and call of appetite.

Though a man knew that his life must be supported by eating, reason could not direct him when to eat, or what; how much, or how often. In all these things, appetite is a much better guide than our reason. Were reason only to direct us in this matter, its calm voice would often be drowned in the hurry of business, or the charms of amusement. But the voice of appe‹124›tite rises gradually, and, at last, becomes loud enough to call off our attention from any other employment.

Every man must be convinced, that, without our appetites, even supposing mankind inspired with all the knowledge requisite for answering their ends, the race of men must have perished long ago; but, by their means, the race is continued from one generation to another, whether men

be savage or civilized, knowing or ignorant, virtuous or vicious.

By the same means, every tribe of brute-animals, from the whale that ranges the ocean to the least microscopic insect, has been continued from the beginning of the world to this day; nor has good evidence been found, that any one species which GOD made has perished.

Nature has given to every animal, not only an appetite for its food, but taste and smell, by which it distinguishes the food proper for it.

It is pleasant to see a caterpillar, which nature intended to live upon the leaf of one species of plant, travel over a hundred leaves of other kinds without tasting one, till it comes to that which is its natural food, which it immediately falls on, and devours greedily.

Most caterpillars feed only upon the leaf of one species of plant, and nature suits the season of their production to the food that is intended to nourish them. Many insects and animals have a greater variety of food; but, of all animals, man has the greatest variety, being able to subsist upon almost every kind of vegetable or animal food, from the bark of trees to the oil of whales.

I believe our natural appetites may be made more violent by ‹125› excessive indulgence, and that, on the other hand, they may be weakened by starving. The first is often the effect of a pernicious luxury, the last may sometimes be the effect of want, sometimes of superstition. I apprehend that nature has given to our appetites that degree of strength which is most proper for us; and that whatever alters their natural tone, either in excess or in defect, does not mend the work of nature, but may mar and pervert it.

A man may eat from appetite only. So the brutes commonly do. He may eat to please his taste when he has no call of appetite. I believe a brute may do this also. He may eat for the sake of health, when neither appetite not taste invites. This, as far as I am able to judge, brutes never do.

From so many different principles, and from many more, the same action may be done; and this may be said of most human actions. From this, it appears, that very different and contrary theories may serve to account for the actions of men. The causes assigned may be sufficient to produce the effect, and yet not be the true causes.

To act merely from appetite is neither good nor ill in a moral view. It is neither an object of praise nor of blame. No man claims any praise because he eats when he is hungry, or rests when he is weary. On the other hand, he is no object of blame, if he obeys the call of appetite when

there is no reason to hinder him. In this, he acts agreeably to his nature.

From this we may observe, that the definition of virtuous actions, given by the ancient Stoics, and adopted by some modern authors, is imperfect. They defined virtuous actions to be such as are *according to nature*.[12] What is done according to the animal part of our nature, which is common to us with the brute-animals, is in itself neither virtuous nor vicious, but perfectly in ‹126›different. Then only it becomes vicious, when it is done in opposition to some principle of superior importance and authority. And it may be virtuous, if done for some important or worthy end.

Appetites, considered in themselves, are neither social principles of action, nor selfish. They cannot be called social, because they imply no concern for the good of others. Nor can they justly be called selfish, though they be commonly referred to that class. An appetite draws us to a certain object, without regard to its being good for us, or ill. There is no self-love implied in it any more than benevolence. We see, that, in many cases, appetite may lead a man to what he knows will be to his hurt. To call this acting from self-love, is to pervert the meaning of words. It is evident, that, in every case of this kind, self-love is sacrificed to appetite.

There are some principles of the human frame very like to our appetites, though they do not commonly get that name.

Men are made for labour either of body or mind. Yet excessive labour hurts the powers of both. To prevent this hurt, nature hath given to men, and other animals, an uneasy sensation, which always attends excessive labour, and which we call *fatigue*, *weariness*, *lassitude*. This uneasy sensation is conjoined with the desire of rest, or intermission of our

12. In his suggested revisions to Reid's final manuscript, Dugald Stewart objected: 'I think it doubtful if the remark, at the bottom of Page 66 [of the manuscript], be applicable to the Stoicks. Though virtuous actions, according to them, are such as are according to nature , I think they explained the phrase so as to exclude those natural acts that are common to us with brutes. Nature they said has given every object a value, and rendered some things preferable to others. Virtue consists in regulating our conduct suitably to this natural preference. It requires therefore choice and selection to live and act agreeably to nature. The definition of officium is founded upon this doctrine. There could not be this choice and selection, this rational estimation of things, when the conduct proceeded from the impulse of animal appetite. In whatever uncommon sense they applied words and phrases, I think their System required the strictest self-government, & the interference of a regulating principle in all virtuous conduct.' 1/II/1, 78–9.

labour. And thus nature calls us to rest when we are weary, in the same manner as to eat when we are hungry.

In both cases there is a desire of a certain object, and an uneasy sensation accompanying that desire. In both cases the desire is satiated by its object, and returns after certain intervals. In this only they differ, that in the appetites first mentioned, the uneasy sensation arises at intervals without action, and leads ‹127› to a certain action: In weariness, the uneasy sensation arises from action too long continued, and leads to rest.

But nature intended that we should be active, and we need some principle to incite us to action, when we happen not to be invited by any appetite or passion.

For this end, when strength and spirits are recruited by rest, nature has made total inaction as uneasy as excessive labour.

We may call this the principle of *activity*. It is most conspicuous in children, who cannot be supposed to know how useful and necessary it is for their improvement to be constantly employed. Their constant activity therefore appears not to proceed from their having some end constantly in view, but rather from this, that they desire to be always doing something, and feel uneasiness in total inaction.

Nor is this principle confined to childhood; it has great effects in advanced life.

When a man has neither hope, nor fear, nor desire, nor project, nor employment, of body or mind, one might be apt to think him the happiest mortal upon earth, having nothing to do but to enjoy himself: but we find him, in fact, the most unhappy.

He is more weary of inaction than ever he was of excessive labour. He is weary of the world, and of his own existence; and is more miserable than the sailor wrestling with a storm, or the soldier mounting a breach.

This dismal state is commonly the lot of the man who has neither exercise of body nor employment of mind. For the‹128› mind, like water, corrupts and putrifies by stagnation, but by running purifies and refines.

Besides the appetites which nature hath given us for useful and necessary purposes, we may create appetites which nature never gave.

The frequent use of things which stimulate the nervous system, produces a languor when their effect is gone off, and a desire to repeat them. By this means a desire of a certain object is created, accompanied by an uneasy sensation. Both are removed for a time by the object desired; but they return after a certain interval. This differs from natural appetite, only in being acquired by custom. Such are the appetites which

some men acquire for the use of tobacco, for opiates, and for intoxicating liqours.

These are commonly called habits, and justly. But there are different kinds of habits, even of the active sort, which ought to be distinguished. Some habits produce only a facility of doing a thing, without any inclination to do it. All arts are habits of this kind, but they cannot be called principles of action. Other habits produce a proneness to do an action, without thought or intention. These we considered before as mechanical principles of action. There are other habits which produce a desire of a certain object, and an uneasy sensation, till it is obtained. It is this last kind only that I call acquired appetites.

As it is best to preserve our natural appetites, in that tone and degree of strength which nature gives them, so we ought to beware of acquiring appetites which nature never gave. They are always useless, and very often hurtful.

Although, as was before observed, there be neither virtue nor ‹129› vice in acting from appetite, there may be much of either in the management of our appetites

When appetite is opposed by some principle drawing a contrary way, there must be a determination of the will, which shall prevail, and this determination may be, in a moral sense, right or wrong.

Appetite, even in a brute-animal, may be restrained by a stronger principle opposed to it. A dog, when he is hungry and has meat set before him, may be kept from touching it by the fear of immediate punishment. In this case his fear operates more strongly than his desire.

Do we attribute any virtue to the dog on this account? I think not. Nor should we ascribe any virtue to a man in a like case. The animal is carried by the strongest moving force. This requires no exertion, no self-government, but passively to yield to the strongest impulse. This, I think, brutes always do; therefore we attribute to them, neither virtue nor vice. We consider them as being neither objects of moral approbation, nor disapprobation.

But it may happen, that when appetite draws one way, it may be opposed, not by any appetite or passion, but by some cool principle of action, which has authority without any impulsive force: For example, by some interest, which is too distant to raise any passion or emotion; or by some consideration of decency, or of duty.

In cases of this kind, the man is convinced that he ought not to yield to appetite, yet there is not an equal or a greater impulse to oppose it. There

are circumstances, indeed, that convince the judgment, but these are not sufficient to determine the will against a strong appetite, without self-government.

‹130› I apprehend that brute-animals have no power of self-government. From their constitution, they must be led by the appetite or passion which is strongest for the time.

On this account they have, in all ages, and among all nations, been thought incapable of being governed by laws, though some of them may be subjects of discipline.

The same would be the condition of man, if he had no power to restrain appetite, but by a stronger contrary appetite or passion. It would be to no purpose to prescribe laws to him for the government of his actions. You might as well forbid the wind to blow, as forbid him to follow whatever happens to give the strongest present impulse.

Every one knows, that when appetite draws one way, duty, decency, or even interest, may draw the contrary way; and that appetite may give a stronger impulse than any one of these, or even all of them conjoined. Yet it is certain, that, in every case of this kind, appetite ought to yield to any of these principles when it stands opposed to them. It is in such cases that self-government is necessary.

The man who suffers himself to be led by appetite to do what he knows he ought not to do, has an immediate and natural conviction that he did wrong, and might have done otherwise; and therefore he condemns himself, and confesses that he yielded to an appetite which ought to have been under his command.

Thus it appears, that though our natural appetites have in themselves neither virtue nor vice, though the acting merely from appetite, when there is no principle of greater authority to oppose it, be a matter indifferent; yet there may be a great deal of virtue or of vice in the management of our appetites; ‹131› and that the power of self-government is necessary for their regulation.

CHAP. II.

Of Desires.[13]

ANOTHER class of animal principles of action in man, I shall, for want of a better specific name, call *desires*.

They are distinguished from appetites by this: That there is not an uneasy sensation proper to each, and always accompanying it; and that they are not periodical, but constant, not being sated with their objects for a time, as appetites are.

The desires I have in view, are chiefly these three, the desire of power, the desire of esteem, and the desire of knowledge.

We may, I think, perceive some degree of these principles in brute-animals of the more sagacious kind; but in man they are much more conspicuous, and have a larger sphere.

In a herd of black cattle there is a rank and subordination. When a stranger is introduced into the herd, he must fight every one till his rank is settled. Then he yields to the stronger and assumes authority over the weaker. The case is much the same in the crew of a ship of war.

As soon as men associate together, the desire of superiority discovers itself. In barbarous tribes, as well as among the gregarious kinds of animals, rank is determined by strength, courage, swiftness, or such other qualities. Among civilized nations, many things of a different kind give power and rank; ‹132› places in government, titles of honour, riches, wisdom, eloquence, virtue, and even the reputation of these. All these are either different species of power, or means of acquiring it; and when they are sought for that end, must be considered as instances of the desire of power.

The desire of esteem is not peculiar to man. A dog exults in the approbation and applause of his master, and is humbled by his displeasure. But in man this desire is much more conspicuous, and operates in a thousand different ways.

13. See note 11, p. 92. For the topics of this and the following chapter, see also 7/V/1, 19–23, and 7/V/14, 1–5, which may be part of an undated lecture, in which Reid rounds off an account of the ‘selfish’ system with a critical analysis of John Gay’s ‘A Dissertation concerning the Fundamental Principle and Immediate Criterion of Virtue’, prefaced to William King’s *An Essay on the Origin of Evil.* Gay had not, Reid says, been improved upon by David Hartley or Joseph Priestley in this matter; in fact, these modern Epicureans had hardly added to the arguments of their ancient predecessors.

Hence it is that so very few are proof against flattery, when it is not very gross. We wish to be well in the opinion of others, and therefore are prone to interpret in our own favour, the signs of their good opinion, even when they are ambiguous.

There are few injuries that are not more easy to be born than contempt.

We cannot always avoid seeing, in the conduct of others, things that move contempt; but, in all polite circles, the signs of it must be suppressed, otherwise men could not converse together.

As there is no quality, common to good and bad men, more esteemed than courage, nor any thing in a man more the object of contempt than cowardice; hence every man desires to be thought a man of courage; and the reputation of cowardice is worse than death. How many have died to avoid being thought cowards? How many, for the same reason, have done what made them unhappy to the end of their lives.

I believe many a tragical event, if traced to its source in human nature, might be referred to the desire of esteem, or the dread of contempt.

‹133› In brute-animals there is so little that can be called knowledge, that the desire of it can make no considerable figure in them. Yet I have seen a cat, when brought into a new habitation, examine with care every corner of it, and anxious to know every lurking place, and the avenues to it. And I believe the same thing may be observed in many other species, especially in those that are liable to be hunted by man, or by other animals.

But the desire of knowledge in the human species, is a principle that cannot escape our observation.

The curiosity of children is the principle that occupies most of their time while they are awake. What they can handle they examine on all sides, and often break in pieces, in order to discover what is within.

When men grow up their curiosity does not cease, but is employed upon other objects. Novelty is considered as one great source of the pleasures of taste, and indeed is necessary, in one degree or other, to give a relish to them all.

When we speak of the desire of knowledge as a principle of action in man, we must not confine it to the pursuits of the Philosopher, or of the literary man. The desire of knowledge discovers itself, in one person, by an avidity to know the scandal of the village, and who makes love, and to whom; in another, to know the economy of the next family; in another, to know what the post brings, and, in another, to trace the path of a new comet.

When men shew an anxiety, and take pains to know what is of no moment, and can be of no use to themselves or to others, this is trifling, and vain curiosity. It is a culpable weakness and folly; but still it is the wrong direction of a natural principle; ‹134› and shews the force of that principle, more than when it is directed to matters worthy to be known.

I think it unnecessary to use arguments to show, that the desires of power, of esteem, and of knowledge, are natural principles in the constitution of man. Those who are not convinced of this by reflecting upon their own feelings and sentiments, will not easily be convinced by arguments.

Power, esteem and knowledge, are so useful for many purposes, that it is easy to resolve the desire of them into other principles. Those who do so must maintain, that we never desire these objects for their own sakes, but as means only of procuring pleasure, or something which is a natural object of desire. This, indeed, was the doctrine of EPICURUS; and it has had its votaries in modern times. But it has been observed, that men desire posthumous fame, which can procure no pleasure.

EPICURUS himself, though he believed that he should have no existence after death, was so desirous to be remembered with esteem, that, by his last will, he appointed his heirs to commemorate his birth annually, and to give a monthly feast to his disciples, upon the twentieth day of the moon. What pleasure could this give to EPICURUS when he had no existence? On this account, CICERO justly observes, that his doctrine was refuted by his own practice.[14]

Innumerable instances occur in life, of men who sacrifice ease, pleasure, and every thing else, to the lust of power, of fame, or even of knowledge. It is absurd to suppose, that men should sacrifice the end to what they desire only as the means of promoting that end.

The natural desires I have mentioned are, in themselves, neither virtuous nor vicious. They are part of our constitution, ‹135› and ought to be regulated and restrained, when they stand in competition with more important principles. But to eradicate them if it were possible, (and I believe it is not) would only be like cutting off a leg or an arm, that is, making ourselves other creatures than GOD has made us.

They cannot, with propriety, be called selfish principles, though they have commonly been accounted such.

14. See *De finibus*, II.xxxi (102–3). In his suggested revisions to the final manuscript, Dugald Stewart disputes the accuracy of this account of Epicurus' will: 1/II/1, 78.

When power is desired for its own sake, and not as the means in order to obtain something else, this desire is neither selfish nor social. When a man desires power as the means of doing good to others, this is benevolence. When he desires it only as the means of promoting his own good, this is self-love. But when he desires it for its own sake, this only can properly be called the desire of power; and it implies neither self-love nor benevolence. The same thing may be applied to the desires of esteem and of knowledge.

The wise intention of nature in giving us these desires, is no less evident than in giving our natural appetites.

Without the natural appetites, reason, as was before observed, would be insufficient, either for the preservation of the individual, or the continuation of the species; and without the natural desires we have mentioned, human virtue would be insufficient to influence mankind to a tolerable conduct in society.

To these natural desires, common to good and to bad men, it is owing, that a man, who has little or no regard to virtue, may notwithstanding be a good member of society. It is true, indeed, that perfect virtue, joined with perfect knowledge, would make both our appetites and desires unnecessary incumbrances of our nature; but as human knowledge and human ‹136› virtue are both very imperfect, these appetites and desires are necessary supplements to our imperfections.

Society, among men, could not subsist without a certain degree of that regularity of conduct which virtue prescribes. To this regularity of conduct, men who have no virtue are induced by a regard to character, sometimes by a regard to interest.

Even in those who are not destitute of virtue, a regard to character is often an useful auxiliary to it, when both principles concur in their direction.

The pursuits of power, of fame, and of knowledge, require a self-command no less than virtue does. In our behaviour towards our fellow-creatures, they generally lead to that very conduct which virtue requires. I say *generally*, for this, no doubt, admits of exceptions, especially in the case of ambition, or the desire of power.

The evils which ambition has produced in the world are a common topic of declamation. But it ought to be observed, that where it has led to one action hurtful to society, it has led to ten thousand that are beneficial to it. And we justly look upon the want of ambition as one of the most unfavourable symptoms in a man’s temper.

The desires of esteem and of knowledge are highly useful to society, as well as the desire of power, and, at the same time, are less dangerous in their excesses.

Although actions proceeding merely from the love of power, of reputation, or of knowledge, cannot be accounted virtuous, or be entitled to moral approbation; yet we allow them to be manly, ingenuous, and suited to the dignity of human nature; ‹137› and therefore they are entitled to a degree of estimation, superior to those which proceed from mere appetite.

ALEXANDER the Great deserved that epithet in the early part of his life, when ease and pleasure, and every appetite, were sacrificed to the love of glory and power. But when we view him conquered by oriental luxury, and using his power to gratify his passions and appetites, he sinks in our esteem, and seems to forfeit the title which he had acquired.

SARDANAPALUS, who is said to have pursued pleasure as eagerly as ALEXANDER pursued glory, never obtained from mankind the appellation of *the Great*.[15]

Appetite is the principle of most of the actions of brutes, and we account it brutal in a man to employ himself chiefly in the gratification of his appetites. The desires of power, of esteem, and of knowledge, are capital parts in the constitution of man; and the actions proceeding from them, though not properly virtuous, are human and manly; and they claim a just superiority over those that proceed from appetite. This, I think, is the universal and unbiassed judgment of mankind. Upon what ground this judgment is founded, may deserve to be considered in its proper place.[16]

The desires we have mentioned are not only highly useful in society, and in their nature more noble than our appetites, they are likewise the most proper engines that can be used in the education and discipline of men.

In training brute-animals to such habits as they are capable of, the fear of punishment is the chief instrument to be used. But in training men of ingenuous disposition, ambition to excel, and the love of esteem, are much nobler and more powerful‹138› engines, by which they may be led to worthy conduct, and trained to good habits.

To this we may add, that the desires we have mentioned are very friendly to real virtue, and make it more easy to be acquired.

15. Sardanapalus is said by the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca Historica*, II.ii) to have been the last king of the Assyrians. He exceeded all his predecessors in sloth and luxury, and allowed Assyria to fall to the Medes.
16. Reid does not in fact pursue this topic further in *Essays on the Active Powers*.

A man that is not quite abandoned must behave so in society as to preserve some degree of reputation. This every man desires to do, and the greater part actually do it. In order to this, he must acquire the habit of restraining his appetites and passions within the bounds which common decency requires, and so as to make himself a tolerable member of society, if not an useful and agreeable one.

It cannot be doubted that many, from a regard to character and to the opinion of others, are led to make themselves both useful and agreeable members of society, in whom a sense of duty has but a small influence.

Thus men, living in society, especially in polished society, are tamed and civilized by the principles that are common to good and bad men. They are taught to bring their appetites and passions under due restraint before the eyes of men, which makes it more easy to bring them under the rein of virtue.

As a horse that is broken is more easily managed than an unbroken colt, so the man who has undergone the discipline of society is more tractable, and is in an excellent state of preparation for the discipline of virtue; and that self-command, which is necessary in the race of ambition and honour, is an attainment of no small importance in the course of virtue.

For this reason, I apprehend, they err very grossly who conceive the life of a hermit to be favourable to a course of virtue. ‹139› The hermit, no doubt, is free from some temptations to vice, but he is deprived of many strong inducements to self-government, as well as of every opportunity of exercising the social virtues.

A very ingenious author has resolved our moral sentiments respecting the virtues of self-government, into a regard to the opinion of men.[17] This I think is giving a great deal too much to the love of esteem, and putting the shadow of virtue in place of the substance; but that a regard to the opinion of others is, in most instances of our external behaviour, a great inducement to good conduct, cannot be doubted. For, whatever men may practice themselves, they will always approve of that in others which they think right.

It was before observed, that, besides the appetites which nature has

17. Reid routinely associated Adam Smith with ‘the selfish system’ and Epicureanism. See, e.g., his extensive analysis of Smith’s core theory in 3/I/28, at p. 3 (transcription published by J. C. Stewart-Robertson and David Fate Norton, in ‘Thomas Reid on Adam Smith’s Theory of Morals. Part 2’). For Smith, see the account of ‘self-command’ in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VI.ii.3.

given us, we may acquire appetites which, by indulgence, become as importunate as the natural. The same thing may be applied to desires.

One of the most remarkable acquired desires is that of money, which, in commercial states, will be found in most men, in one degree or other, and, in some men, swallows up every other desire, appetite and passion.

The desire of money can then only be accounted a principle of action, when it is desired for its own sake, and not merely as the means of procuring something else.

It seems evident, that there is in misers, such a desire of money; and, I suppose, no man will say that it is natural, or a part of our original constitution. It seems to be the effect of habit.

In commercial nations, money is an instrument by which almost every thing may be procured that is desired. Being useful‹140› for many different purposes as the means, some men lose sight of the end, and terminate their desire upon the means. Money is also a species of power, putting a man in condition to do many things which he could not do without it; and power is a natural object of desire, even when it is not exercised.

In like manner, a man may acquire the desire of a title of honour, of an equipage, of an estate.

Although our natural desires are highly beneficial to society, and even aiding to virtue, yet acquired desires are not only useless, but hurtful and even disgraceful.

No man is ashamed to own, that he loves power, that he loves esteem, that he loves knowledge, for their own sake. There may be an excess in the love of these things, which is a blemish; but there is a degree of it, which is natural, and is no blemish. To love money, titles or equipage, on any other account than as they are useful or ornamental, is allowed by all to be weakness and folly.

The natural desires I have been considering, though they cannot be called *social* principles of action in the common sense of that word, since it is not their object to procure any good or benefit to others, yet they have such a relation to society, as to shew most evidently the intention of nature to be, that man should live in society.

The desire of knowledge is not more natural than is the desire of communicating our knowledge. Even power would be less valued if there were no opportunity of shewing it to others. It derives half its value from that circumstance. And as to the desire of esteem, it can have no possible gratification but in society.

‹141› These parts of our constitution, therefore, are evidently intended

for social life; and it is not more evident that birds were made for flying and fishes for swimming, than that man, endowed with a natural desire of power, of esteem, and of knowledge, is made, not for the savage and solitary state, but for living in society.

CHAP. III.

Of Benevolent Affection in general.[18]

WE have seen how, by instinct and habit, a kind of mechanical principles, man, without any expence of thought, without deliberation or will, is led to many actions, necessary for his preservation and well-being, which, without those principles, all his skill and wisdom would not have been able to accomplish.

It may perhaps be thought, that his deliberate and voluntary actions are to be guided by his reason.

But it ought to be observed, that he is a voluntary agent long before he has the use of reason. Reason and virtue, the prerogatives of man, are of the latest growth. They come to maturity by slow degrees, and are too weak, in the greater part of the species, to secure the preservation of individuals and of communities, and to produce that varied scene of human life, in which they are to be exercised and improved.

Therefore the wise Author of our being hath implanted in human nature many inferior principles of action, which, with little or no aid of reason or virtue, preserve the species, and produce the various exertions, and the various changes and revolutions which we observe upon the theatre of life.

‹142› In this busy scene, reason and virtue have access to act their parts, and do often produce great and good effects; but whether they interpose or not, there are actors of an inferior order that will carry on the play, and produce a variety of events, good or bad.

Reason, if it were perfect, would lead men to use the proper means of preserving their own lives, and continuing their kind. But the Author of our being hath not thought fit to leave this task to reason alone, otherwise the race would long ago have been extinct. He hath given us, in common with other animals, appetites, by which those important purposes are

18. The subjects of this and the following chapter were presented in a paper to the Glasgow Literary Society, 2/I/10. Cf. note 1, Chap. 1, Part II of this Essay.

secured, whether men be wise or foolish, virtuous or vicious.

Reason, if it were perfect, would lead men neither to lose the benefit of their active powers by inactivity, nor to overstrain them by excessive labour. But nature hath given a powerful assistant to reason, by making inactivity a grievous punishment to itself; and by annexing the pain of lassitude to excessive labour.

Reason, if it were perfect, would lead us to desire power, knowledge, and the esteem and affection of our fellow-men, as means of promoting our own happiness, and of being useful to others. Here again, nature, to supply the defects of reason, hath given us a strong natural desire of those objects, which leads us to pursue them without regard to their utility.

These principles we have already considered; and, we may observe, that all of them have things, not persons, for their object. They neither imply any good nor ill affection towards any other person, nor even towards ourselves. They cannot therefore, with propriety, be called either *selfish* or *social*. But there are various principles of action in man, which have persons for their immediate object, and imply, in their very nature, ‹143› our being well or ill affected to some person, or, at least, to some animated being.

Such principles I shall call by the general name of *affections*; whether they dispose us to do good or hurt to others.

Perhaps, in giving them this general name, I extend the meaning of the word *affection* beyond its common use in discourse. Indeed our language seems in this to have departed a little from analogy: For we use the verb *affect*, and the participle *affected*, in an indifferent sense, so that they may be joined either with good or ill. A man may be said to be ill affected towards another man, or well affected. But the word *affection*, which, according to analogy, ought to have the same latitude of signification with that from which it is derived, and therefore ought to be applicable to ill affections as well as to good, seems, by custom, to be limited to good affections. When we speak of having affection for any person, it is always understood to be a benevolent affection.

Malevolent principles, such as anger, resentment, envy, are not commonly called *affections*, but rather *passions*.

I take the reason of this to be, that the malevolent affections are almost always accompanied with that perturbation of mind which we properly call *passion*; and this passion, being the most conspicuous ingredient, gives its name to the whole.

Even love, when it goes beyond a certain degree, is called a *passion*.

But it gets not that name when it is so moderate as not to discompose a man's mind, nor deprive him in any measure of the government of himself.

As we give the name of *passion*, even to benevolent affection when it is so vehement as to discompose the mind, so, I think, ‹144› without trespassing much against propriety of words, we may give the name of *affection* even to malevolent principles, when unattended with that disturbance of mind which commonly, though not always, goes along with them, and which has made them get the name of *passions*.

The principles which lead us immediately to desire the good of others, and those that lead us to desire their hurt, agree in this, that persons, and not things, are their immediate object. Both imply our being some way affected towards the person. They ought therefore to have some common name to express what is common in their nature; and I know no name more proper for this than *affection*.

Taking affection therefore in this extensive sense, our affections are very naturally divided into benevolent and malevolent, according as they imply our being well or ill affected towards their object.

There are some things common to all benevolent affections, others wherein they differ.

They differ both in the feeling, or sensation, which is an ingredient in all of them, and in the objects to which they are directed.

They all agree in two things, to wit, That the feeling which accompanies them is agreeable; and that they imply a desire of good and happiness to their object.

The affection we bear to a parent, to a child, to a benefactor, to a person in distress, to a mistress, differ not more in their object, than in the feelings they produce in the mind. We have not names to express the differences of these feelings, but every man is conscious of a difference. Yet, with all this difference, they agree in being agreeable feelings.

‹145› I know no exception to this rule, if we distinguish, as we ought, the feeling which naturally and necessarily attends the kind affection, from those which accidentally, in certain circumstances, it may produce.

The parental affection is an agreeable feeling; but it makes the misfortune or misbehaviour of a child give a deeper wound to the mind. Pity is an agreeable feeling, yet distress, which we are not able to relieve, may give a painful sympathy. Love to one of the other sex is an agreeable feeling; but where it does not meet with a proper return, it may give the most pungent distress.

The joy and comfort of human life consists in the reciprocal exercise of kind affections, and without them life would be undesirable.

It has been observed by Lord SHAFTESBURY, and by many other judicious moralists, That even the epicure and the debauchee, who are thought to place all their happiness in the gratifications of sense, and to pursue these as their only object, can find no relish in solitary indulgences of this kind, but in those only that are mixed with social intercourse, and a reciprocal exchange of kind affections.[19]

CICERO has observed, that the word, *convivium*, which in Latin signifies a feast, is not borrowed from eating or from drinking, but from that social intercourse which, being the chief part of such an entertainment, gives the name to the whole.[20]

Mutual kind affections are undoubtedly the balm of life, and of all the enjoyments common to good and bad men, are the chief. If a man had no person whom he loved or esteemed, no person who loved or esteemed him, how wretched must his con‹146›dition be! Surely a man capable of reflection would chuse to pass out of existence, rather than to live in such a state.

It has been, by the Poets, represented as the state of some bloody and barbarous tyrants; but Poets are allowed to paint a little beyond the life. ATREUS is represented as saying, *Oderint dum metuant* . 'I care not for their hatred, providing they dread my power.'[21] I believe there never was a man so disposed towards all mankind. The most odious tyrant that ever was, will have his favourites, whose affection he endeavours to deserve or to bribe, and to whom he bears some good will.

We may therefore lay it down as a principle, that all benevolent affections are, in their nature, agreeable; and that, next to a good conscience, to which they are always friendly, and never can be adverse, they make the capital part of human happiness.

Another ingredient essential to every benevolent affection, and from which it takes the name, is a desire of the good and happiness of the object.

The object of benevolent affection therefore, must be some being capable of happiness. When we speak of affection to a house, or to

19. See Shaftesbury, *Sensus Communis, an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour*, Part III, Section 3; in *Characteristicks*, vol. 1, p. 76.
20. See *De senectute*, 45.
21. The phrase is from *Atreus* by the Roman poet Lucius Accius (170–*c.* 86 BCE). It was taken as a motto by the emperor Caligula.

any inanimate thing, the word has a different meaning. For that which has no capacity of enjoyment, or of suffering, may be an object of liking or disgust, but cannot possibly be an object either of benevolent or malevolent affection.

A thing may be desired either on its own account, or as the means in order to something else. That only can properly be called an object of desire, which is desired upon its own account; and it is only such desires that I call principles of action. When any thing is desired as the means only, there must be an end ‹147› for which it is desired; and the desire of the end is, in this case, the principle of action. The means are desired only as they tend to that end; and if different, or even contrary means tended to the same end, they would be equally desired.

On this account I consider those affections only as benevolent, where the good of the object is desired ultimately, and not as the means only, in order to something else.

To say that we desire the good of others, only in order to procure some pleasure or good to ourselves, is to say that there is no benevolent affection in human nature.

This indeed has been the opinion of some Philosophers, both in ancient and in later times. [22] I intend not to examine this opinion in this place, conceiving it proper to give that view of the principles of action in man, which appears to me to be just, before I examine the systems wherein they have been mistaken or misrepresented.[23]

I observe only at present, that it appears as unreasonable to resolve all our benevolent affections into self-love, as it would be to resolve hunger and thirst into self-love.

These appetites are necessary for the preservation of the individual. Benevolent affections are no less necessary for the preservation of society among men, without which man would become an easy prey to the beasts of the field.

We are placed in this world, by the Author of our being, surrounded with many objects that are necessary or useful to us, and with many that may hurt us. We are led, not by reason and self-love only, but by many

22. For a fuller treatment of this, see Chap. 3 in Part III of this Essay, with references in note 1; and Essay V, Chap. 1, note 2.
23. See the discussion in Part III, Chaps. 2–4, of this Essay. Reid's critical remarks about the 'selfish system' are scattered throughout the *Essays on the Active Powers*, but in the manuscripts there are more concentrated analyses, e.g., 7/V/1, 19–23; 7/V/5, 1–3; 7/V/12, 2–4; especially 7/V/14, 1–5.

instincts, and appetites, and natural desires, to seek the former and to avoid the latter.

‹148› But of all the things of this world, man may be the most useful, or the most hurtful to man. Every man is in the power of every man with whom he lives. Every man has power to do much good to his fellow-men, and to do more hurt.

We cannot live without the society of men; and it would be impossible to live in society, if men were not disposed to do much of that good to men, and but little of that hurt, which it is in their power to do.

But how shall this end, so necessary to the existence of human society, and consequently to the existence of the human species, be accomplished?

If we judge from analogy, we must conclude, that in this, as in other parts of our conduct, our rational principles are aided by principles of an inferior order, similar to those by which many brute animals live in society with their species; and that by means of such principles, that degree of regularity is observed, which we find in all societies of men, whether wise or foolish, virtuous or vicious.

The benevolent affections planted in human nature, appear therefore no less necessary for the preservation of the human species, than the appetites of hunger and thirst.

CHAP. IV.

Of the particular Benevolent Affections.[24]

HAVING premised these things in general concerning benevolent affections, I shall now attempt some enumeration of them.

‹149› 1. The *first* I mention is that of parents and children, and other near relations.

This we commonly call *natural* affection. Every language has a name for it. It is common to us with most of the brute-animals; and is variously modified in different animals, according as it is more or less necessary for the preservation of the species.

Many of the insect-tribe need no other care of parents, than that the eggs be laid in a proper place, where they shall have neither too little nor too much heat, and where the animal, as soon as it is hatched, shall find

24. See note 18, p. 106.

its natural food. This care the parent takes, and no more.

In other tribes, the young must be lodged in some secret place, where they cannot be easily discovered by their enemies. They must be cherished by the warmth of the parent's body. They must be suckled, and fed at first with tender food; attended in their excursions, and guarded from danger, till they have learned by experience, and by the example of their parents, to provide for their own subsistence and safety. With what assiduity and tender affection this is done by the parents, in every species that requires it, is well known.

The eggs of the feathered tribe are commonly hatched by incubation of the dam, who leaves off at once her sprightly motions and migrations, and confines herself to her solitary and painful task, cheered by the song of her mate upon a neighbouring bough, and sometimes fed by him, sometimes relieved in her incubation, while she gathers a scanty meal, and with the greatest dispatch returns to her post.

The young birds of many species are so very tender and delicate, that man, with all his wisdom and experience, would not‹150› be able to rear one to maturity. But the parents, without any experience, know perfectly how to rear sometimes a dozen or more at one brood, and to give every one its portion in due season. They know the food best suited to their delicate constitution, which is sometimes afforded by nature, sometimes must be cooked and half digested in the stomach of the parent.

In some animals, nature hath furnished the female with a kind of second womb, into which the young retire occasionally, for food, warmth, and the conveniency of being carried about with the mother.

It would be endless to recount all the various ways in which the parental affection is expressed by brute-animals.

He must, in my apprehension, have a very strange complexion of understanding, who can survey the various ways in which the young of the various species are reared, without wonder, without pious admiration of that manifold wisdom, which hath so skilfully fitted means to ends, in such an infinite variety of ways.

In all the brute-animals we are acquainted with, the end of the parental affection is completely answered in a short time; and then it ceases as if it had never been.

The infancy of man is longer and more helpless than that of any other animal. The parental affection is necessary for many years; it is highly useful through life; and therefore it terminates only with life. It extends to children's children without any diminution of its force.

How common is it to see a young woman, in the gayest period of life, who has spent her days in mirth, and her nights in profound sleep, without solicitude or care, all at once transformed into the careful, the solicitous, the watchful nurse of her dear in ‹151›fant: doing nothing by day but gazing upon it, and serving it in the meanest offices; by night, depriving herself of sound sleep for months, that it may lie safe in her arms. Forgetful of herself, her whole care is centered in this little object.

Such a sudden transformation of her whole habits, and occupation, and turn of mind, if we did not see it every day, would appear a more wonderful *metamorphosis* than any that OVID has described.

This, however, is the work of nature, and not the effect of reason and reflection. For we see it in the good and in the bad, in the most thoughtless, as well as in the thoughtful.

Nature has assigned different departments to the father and mother in rearing their offspring. This may be seen in many brute-animals; and that it is so in the human species, was long ago observed by SOCRATES, and most beautifully illustrated by him, as we learn from XENOPHON's *Oeconomicks*.[25] The parental affection in the different sexes is exactly adapted to the office assigned to each. The father would make an awkward nurse to a new-born child, and the mother too indulgent a guardian. But both act with propriety and grace in their proper sphere.

It is very remarkable, that when the office of rearing a child is transferred from the parent to another person, nature seems to transfer the affection along with the office. A wet nurse, or even a dry nurse, has commonly the same affection for her nursling, as if she had born it. The fact is so well known that nothing needs to be said to confirm it; and it seems to be the work of nature.

Our affections are not immediately in our power, as our outward actions are. Nature has directed them to certain objects. ‹152› We may do kind offices without affection; but we cannot create an affection which nature has not given.

Reason might teach a man that his children are particularly committed to his care by the providence of GOD, and, on that account, that he ought to attend to them as his particular charge; but reason could not teach him to love them more than other children of equal merit, or to be more afflicted for their misfortunes or misbehaviour.

It is evident, therefore, that that peculiar sensibility of affection, with

25. See *Oeconomicus*, VII.17–43.

regard to his own children, is not the effect of reasoning or reflection, but the effect of that constitution which nature has given him.

There are some affections which we may call *rational*, because they are grounded upon an opinion of merit in the object. The parental affection is not of this kind. For though a man's affection to his child may be encreased by merit, and diminished by demerit, I think no man will say, that it took its rise from an opinion of merit. It is not opinion that creates the affection, but affection often creates opinion. It is apt to pervert the judgment, and create an opinion of merit where there is none.

The absolute necessity of this parental affection, in order to the continuance of the human species, is so apparent, that there is no need of arguments to prove it. The rearing of a child from its birth to maturity requires so much time and care, and such infinite attentions, that, if it were to be done merely from considerations of reason and duty, and were not sweetened by affection in parents, nurses and guardians, there is reason to doubt, whether one child in ten thousand would ever be reared.

Beside the absolute necessity of this part of the human constitution to the preservation of the species, its utility is very ‹153› great, for tempering the giddiness and impetuosity of youth, and improving its knowledge by the prudence and experience of age, for encouraging industry and frugality in the parents, in order to provide for their children, for the solace and support of parents under the infirmities of old age; not to mention that it probably gave rise to the first civil governments.

It does not appear that the parental, and other family affections, are, in general, either too strong or too weak for answering their end. If they were too weak, parents would be most apt to err on the side of undue severity; if too strong, of undue indulgence. As they are in fact, I believe no man can say, that the errors are more general on one side than on the other.

When these affections are exerted according to their intention, under the direction of wisdom and prudence, the economy of such a family is a most delightful spectacle, and furnishes the most agreeable and affecting subject to the pencil of the painter, and to the pen of the orator and poet.

2. The *next* benevolent affection I mention is gratitude to benefactors.

That good offices are, by the very constitution of our nature, apt to produce good will towards the benefactor, in good and bad men, in the savage and in the civilized, cannot surely be denied by any one, in the least acquainted with human nature.

The danger of perverting a man's judgment by good deeds, where he

ought to have no bias, is so well known, that it is dishonourable in judges, in witnesses, in electors to offices of trust, to accept of them; and in all civilized nations, they are in such cases, prohibited, as the means of corruption.

‹154› Those who would corrupt the sentence of a judge, the testimony of a witness, or the vote of an elector, know well, that they must not make a bargain, or stipulate what is to be done in return. This would shock every man who has the least pretension to morals. If the person can only be prevailed upon to accept the good office, as a testimony of pure and disinterested friendship, it is left to work upon his gratitude. He finds himself under a kind of moral obligation to consider the cause of his benefactor and friend in the most favourable light. He finds it easier to justify his conduct to himself, by favouring the interest of his benefactor, than by opposing it.

Thus the principle of gratitude is supposed, even in the nature of a bribe. Bad men know how to make this natural principle the most effectual means of corruption. The very best things may be turned to a bad use. But the natural tendency of this principle, and the intention of nature in planting it in the human breast, are, evidently, to promote good-will among men, and to give to good offices the power of multiplying their kind, like seed sown in the earth, which brings a return, with increase.

Whether there be, or be not, in the more sagacious brutes, something that may be called gratitude, I will not dispute. We must allow this important difference between their gratitude and that of the human kind, that, in the last, the mind of the benefactor is chiefly regarded, in the first, the external action only. A brute-animal will be as kindly affected to him who feeds it in order to kill and eat it, as to him who does it from affection.

A man may be justly entitled to our gratitude, for an office that is useful, though it be, at the same time, disagreeable; and not only for doing, but for forbearing what he had a right to do. Among men, it is not every beneficial office that claims our gratitude, but such only as are not due to us in justice. A ‹155› favour alone gives a claim to gratitude; and a favour must be something more than justice requires. It does not appear that brutes have any conception of justice. They can neither distinguish hurt from injury, nor a favour from a good office that is due.

3. A *third* natural benevolent affection is pity and compassion towards the distressed.

Of all persons, those in distress stand most in need of our good offices. And, for that reason, the Author of nature hath planted in the breast of every human creature a powerful advocate to plead their cause.

In man, and in some other animals, there are signs of distress, which nature hath both taught them to use, and taught all men to understand without any interpreter. These natural signs are more eloquent than language; they move our hearts, and produce a sympathy, and a desire to give relief.

There are few hearts so hard, but great distress will conquer their anger, their indignation, and every malevolent affection.

We sympathise even with the traitor and with the assassin, when we see him led to execution. It is only self-preservation, and the public good, that makes us reluctantly assent to his being cut off from among men.

The practice of the Canadian nations toward their prisoners would tempt one to think, that they have been able to root out the principle of compassion from their nature. But this, I apprehend, would be a rash conclusion. It is only a part of the prisoners of war that they devote to a cruel death. This gratifies the revenge of the women and children who have lost their ‹156› husbands and fathers in the war. The other prisoners are kindly used, and adopted as brethren.

Compassion with bodily pain is no doubt weakened among these savages, because they are trained from their infancy to be superior to death, and to every degree of pain; and he is thought unworthy of the name of a man, who cannot defy his tormentors, and sing his death-song in the midst of the most cruel tortures. He who can do this, is honoured as a brave man, though an enemy. But he must perish in the experiment.

A Canadian has the most perfect contempt for every man who thinks pain an intolerable evil. And nothing is so apt to stifle compassion as contempt, and an apprehension, that the evil suffered is nothing but what ought to be manfully borne.

It must also be observed, that savages set no bounds to their revenge. Those who find no protection in laws and government never think themselves safe, but in the destruction of their enemy. And one of the chief advantages of civil government is, that it tempers the cruel passion of revenge, and opens the heart to compassion with every human woe.

It seems to be false religion only, that is able to check the tear of compassion.

We are told, that, in Portugal and Spain, a man condemned to be burned as an obstinate heretick, meets with no compassion, even from the

multitude. It is true, they are taught to look upon him as an enemy to GOD, and doomed to hell-fire. But should not this very circumstance move compassion? Surely it would, if they were not taught, that, in this case, it is a crime to shew compassion, or even to feel it.

4. A *fourth* benevolent affection is, esteem of the wise and the good.

‹157› The worst men cannot avoid feeling this in some degree. Esteem, veneration, devotion, are different degrees of the same affection. The perfection of wisdom, power and goodness, which belongs only to the ALMIGHTY, is the object of the last.

It may be a doubt, whether this principle of esteem, as well as that of gratitude, ought to be ranked in the order of animal principles, or if they ought not rather to be placed in a higher order. They are certainly more allied to the rational nature than the others that have been named; nor is it evident, that there is any thing in brute-animals that deserves the same name.

There is indeed a subordination in a herd of cattle, and in a flock of sheep, which, I believe, is determined by strength and courage, as it is among savage tribes of men. I have been informed, that, in a pack of hounds, a stanch hound acquires a degree of esteem in the pack; so that, when the dogs are wandering in quest of the scent, if he opens, the pack immediately closes in with him, when they would not regard the opening of a dog of no reputation. This is something like a respect to wisdom.

But I have placed esteem of the wise and good in the order of animal principles, not from any persuasion that it is to be found in brute-animals, but because, I think, it appears in the most unimproved and in the most degenerate part of our species, even in those in whom we hardly perceive any exertion, either of reason or virtue.

I will not, however, dispute with any man who thinks that it deserves a more honourable name than that of an animal principle. It is of small importance what name we give it, if we are satisfied that there is such a principle in the human constitution.

‹158› 5. Friendship is another benevolent affection.

Of this we have some instances famous in history: Few indeed; but sufficient to shew, that human nature is susceptible of that extraordinary attachment, sympathy and affection, to one or a few persons, which the ancients thought alone worthy of the name of friendship.

The Epicureans found it very difficult to reconcile the existence of friendship to the principles of their sect. They were not so bold as to deny its existence. They even boasted that there had been more attachments of

that kind between Epicureans than in any other sect. But the difficulty was, to account for real friendship upon Epicurean principles. They went into different hypotheses upon this point, three of which are explained by TORQUATUS the Epicurean, in CICERO's book, *De Finibus*.[26]

CICERO, in his reply to TORQUATUS, examines all the three, and shews them all to be either inconsistent with the nature of true friendship, or inconsistent with the fundamental principles of the Epicurean sect.[27]

As to the friendship which the Epicureans boasted of among those of their sect, CICERO does not question the fact, but observes, that, as there are many whose practice is worse than their principles, so there are some whose principles are worse than their practice, and that the bad principles of these Epicureans were overcome by the goodness of their nature.[28]

6. Among the benevolent affections, the passion of love between the sexes cannot be overlooked.

Although it is commonly the theme of Poets, it is not unworthy of the pen of the Philosopher, as it is a most important part of the human constitution.

‹159› It is no doubt made up of various ingredients, as many other principles of action are, but it certainly cannot exist without a very strong benevolent affection toward its object; in whom it finds, or conceives, every thing that is amiable and excellent, and even something more than human. I consider it here, only as a benevolent affection natural to man. And that it is so, no man can doubt who ever felt its force.

It is evidently intended by nature to direct a man in the choice of a mate, with whom he desires to live, and to rear an offspring.

It has effectually secured this end in all ages, and in every state of society.

The passion of love, and the parental affection, are counterparts to each other; and when they are conducted with prudence, and meet with a proper return, are the source of all domestic felicity, the greatest, next to that of a good conscience, which this world affords.

As, in the present state of things, pain often dwells near to pleasure, and sorrow to joy, it needs not be thought strange, that a passion, fitted and intended by nature to yield the greatest worldly felicity, should, by being ill regulated, or wrong directed, prove the occasion of the most pungent distress.

26. See *De finibus*, I.xx (65–70).
27. See *De finibus*, II.xxvi (82–5).
28. See *De finibus*, II.xxv (81).

But its joys and its griefs, its different modifications in the different sexes, and its influence upon the character of both, though very important subjects, are fitter to be sung than said; and I leave them to those who have slept upon the two-topped Parnassus.[29]

7. The *last* benevolent affection I shall mention is, what we ‹160› commonly call *public spirit*, that is, an affection to any community to which we belong.

If there be any man quite destitute of this affection, he must be as great a monster as a man born with two heads. Its effects are manifest in the whole of human life, and in the history of all nations.

The situation of a great part of mankind, indeed, is such, that their thoughts and views must be confined within a very narrow sphere, and be very much engrossed by their private concerns. With regard to an extensive public, such as a state or nation, they are like a drop to the ocean, so that they have rarely an opportunity of acting with a view to it.

In many, whose actions may affect the public, and whose rank and station lead them to think of it, private passions may be an overmatch for public spirit. All that can be inferred from this is, that their public spirit is weak, not that it does not exist.

If a man wishes well to the public, and is ready to do good to it rather than hurt, when it costs him nothing, he has some affection to it, though it may be scandalously weak in degree.

I believe every man has it in one degree or another. What man is there who does not resent satyrical reflections upon his country, or upon any community of which he is a member?

Whether the affection be to a college or to a cloister, to a clan or to a profession, to a party or to a nation, it is public spirit. These affections differ, not in kind, but in the extent of their object.

The object extends as our connections extend; and a sense of ‹161› the connection carries the affection along with it to every community to which we can apply the pronouns *we* and *our*.

Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,
His country next, and then all human race. POPE.[30]

Even in the misanthrope, this affection is not extinguished. It is overpowered by the apprehension he has of the worthlessness, the baseness,

29. In other words, to poets. In Greek myth, Parnassus is the home of the Muses.
30. *An Essay on Man*, Epistle IV, ll. 367–8.

and the ingratitude of mankind. Convince him, that there is any amiable quality in the species, and immediately his philanthropy revives, and rejoices to find an object on which it can exert itself.

Public spirit has this in common with every subordinate principle of action, that, when it is not under the government of reason and virtue, it may produce much evil as well as good. Yet, where there is least of reason and virtue, to regulate it, its good far overbalances its ill.

It sometimes kindles or inflames animosities between communities or contending parties, and makes them treat each other with little regard to justice. It kindles wars between nations, and makes them destroy one another for trifling causes. But, without it, society could not subsist, and every community would be a rope of sand.

When under the direction of reason and virtue, it is the very image of GOD in the soul. It diffuses its benign influence as far as its power extends, and participates in the happiness of GOD, and of the whole creation.

These are the benevolent affections which appear to me to be parts of the human constitution.

If any one thinks the enumeration incomplete, and that there‹162› are natural benevolent affections, which are not included under any of those that have been named, I shall very readily listen to such a correction, being sensible that such enumerations are very often incomplete.

If others should think that any, or all, the affections I have named, are acquired by education, or by habits and associations grounded on self-love, and are not original parts of our constitution; this is a point upon which, indeed, there has been much subtile disputation in ancient and modern times, and which, I believe, must be determined from what a man, by careful reflection, may feel in himself, rather than from what he observes in others. But I decline entering into this dispute, till I shall have explained that principle of action which we commonly call *self-love*.[31]

I shall conclude this subject with some reflections upon the benevolent affections.

The *first* is, That all of them, in as far as they are benevolent, in which view only I consider them, agree very much in the conduct they dispose us to, with regard to their objects.

They dispose us to do them good as far as we have power and opportunity; to wish them well, when we can do them no good; to judge

31. See below, this Essay, Part III, Chaps. ii–iv.

favourably, and often partially, of them; to sympathise with them in their afflictions and calamities; and to rejoice with them in their happiness and good fortune.

It is impossible that there can be benevolent affection without sympathy, both with the good and bad fortune of the object; and it appears to be impossible that there can be sympathy without benevolent affection. Men do not sympathise with one whom they hate; nor even with one to whose good or ill they are perfectly indifferent.

We may sympathise with a perfect stranger, or even with an ‹163› enemy whom we see in distress; but this is the effect of pity; and if we did not pity him, we should not sympathise with him.

I take notice of this the rather, because a very ingenious author in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, gives a very different account of the origin of sympathy.[32] It appears to me to be the effect of benevolent affection, and to be inseparable from it.

A *second* reflection is, That the constitution of our nature very powerfully invites us to cherish and cultivate in our minds the benevolent affections.

The agreeable feeling which always attends them as a present reward, appears to be intended by nature for this purpose.

Benevolence, from its nature, composes the mind, warms the heart, enlivens the whole frame, and brightens every feature of the countenance. It may justly be said to be medicinal both to soul and body. We are bound to it by duty; we are invited to it by interest; and because both these cords are often feeble, we have natural kind affections to aid them in their operation, and supply their defects; and these affections are joined with manly pleasure in their exertion.

A *third* reflection is, That the natural benevolent affections furnish the most irresistible proof, that the Author of our nature intended that we should live in society, and do good to our fellow-men as we have opportunity; since this great and important part of the human constitution has a manifest relation to society, and can have no exercise nor use in a solitary state.

32. Reid elaborates his criticism of Adam Smith's theory of sympathy in a paper preserved in 2/II/6 and 3/I/28 and published by J. C. Stewart-Robertson and David Fate Norton in 'Thomas Reid on Adam Smith's Theory of Morals. Part 2'. Smith describes pity and compassion as *effects* of sympathy. Smithian sympathy in itself is morally neutral: it is imaginatively placing oneself in the situation of another and feeling what one takes the other to feel. See *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I.i.1.

The *last* reflection is, That the different principles of action have different degrees of dignity, and rise one above another in our estimation, when we make them objects of contemplation.

‹164› We ascribe no dignity to instincts or to habits. They lead us only to admire the wisdom of the Creator, in adapting them so perfectly to the manner of life of the different animals in which they are found. Much the same may be said of appetites. They serve rather for use than ornament.

The desires of knowledge, of power, and of esteem, rise higher in our estimation, and we consider them as giving dignity and ornament to man. The actions proceeding from them, though not properly virtuous, are manly and respectable, and claim a just superiority over those that proceed merely from appetite. This I think is the uniform judgment of mankind.

If we apply the same kind of judgment to our benevolent affections, they appear not only manly and respectable, but amiable in a high degree.

They are amiable even in brute-animals. We love the meekness of the lamb, the gentleness of the dove, the affection of a dog to his master. We cannot, without pleasure, observe the timid ewe, who never shewed the least degree of courage in her own defence, become valiant and intrepid in defence of her lamb, and boldly assault those enemies, the very sight of whom was wont to put her to flight.

How pleasant is it to see the family economy of a pair of little birds in rearing their tender offspring; the conjugal affection and fidelity of the parents; their cheerful toil and industry in providing food to their family; their sagacity in concealing their habitation; the arts they use, often at the peril of their own lives, to decoy hawks, and other enemies, from their dwelling-place, and the affliction they feel when some unlucky boy has robbed them of the dear pledges of their affection, and frustrated all their hopes of their rising family?

‹165› If kind affection be amiable in brutes, it is not less so in our own species. Even the external signs of it have a powerful charm.

Every one knows that a person of accomplished good breeding, charms every one he converses with. And what is this good breeding? If we analyze it, we shall find it to be made up of looks, gestures and speeches, which are the natural signs of benevolence and good affection. He who has got the habit of using these signs with propriety, and without meanness, is a well-bred and a polite man.

What is that beauty in the features of the face, particularly of the fair sex, which all men love and admire? I believe it consists chiefly in the

features which indicate good affections. Every indication of meekness, gentleness, and benignity, is a beauty. On the contrary, every feature that indicates pride, passion, envy, and malignity, is a deformity.

Kind affections, therefore, are amiable in brutes. Even the signs and shadows of them are highly attractive in our own species. Indeed they are the joy and the comfort of human life, not to good men only, but even to the vicious and dissolute.

Without society, and the intercourse of kind affection, man is a gloomy, melancholy and joyless being. His mind oppressed with cares and fears, he cannot enjoy the balm of sound sleep: in constant dread of impending danger, he starts at the rustling of a leaf. His ears are con - tinually upon the stretch, and every zephyr brings some sound that alarms him.

When he enters into society, and feels security in the good affection of friends and neighbours, it is then only that his fear ‹166› vanishes, and his mind is at ease. His courage is raised, his understanding is enlightened, and his heart dilates with joy.

Human society may be compared to a heap of embers, which when placed asunder, can retain neither their light nor heat, amidst the surrounding elements; but when brought together they mutually give heat and light to each other; the flame breaks forth, and not only defends itself, but subdues every thing around it.

The security, the happiness, and the strength of human society, spring solely from the reciprocal benevolent affections of its members.

The benevolent affections, though they be all honourable and lovely, are not all equally so. There is a subordination among them; and the honour we pay to them generally corresponds to the extent of their object.

The good husband, the good father, the good friend, the good neighbour, we honour as a good man, worthy of our love and affection. But the man in whom these more private affections are swallowed up in zeal for the good of his country, and of mankind, who goes about doing good, and seeks opportunities of being useful to his species, we revere as more than a good man, as a hero, as a good angel.

CHAP. V.

Of Malevolent Affection.[33]

ARE there, in the constitution of man, any affections that may be called *malevolent*? What are they? And what is their use and end?

‹167› To me there seem to be two, which we may call by that name. They are emulation and resentment. These I take to be parts of the human constitution, given us by our Maker for good ends, and, when properly directed and regulated, of excellent use. But, as their excess or abuse, to which human nature is very prone, is the source and spring of all the malevolence that is to be found among men, it is on that account I call them malevolent.

If any man thinks that they deserve a softer name, since they may be exercised according to the intention of nature, without malevolence, to this I have no objection.

By emulation, I mean, a desire of superiority to our rivals in any pursuit, accompanied with an uneasiness at being surpassed.

Human life has justly been compared to a race.[34] The prize is superiority in one kind or another. But the species or forms (if I may use the expression) of superiority among men are infinitely diversified.

There is no man so contemptible in his own eyes, as to hinder him from entering the lists in one form or another; and he will always find competitors to rival him in his own way.

We see emulation among brute-animals. Dogs and horses contend each with his kind in the race. Many animals of the gregarious kind contend for superiority in their flock or herd, and shew manifest signs of jealousy when others pretend to rival them.

The emulation of the brute-animals is mostly confined to swiftness, or strength, or favour with their females. But the emulation of the human kind has a much wider field.

‹168› In every profession, and in every accomplishment of body or mind, real or imaginary, there are rivalships. Literary men rival one another in literary abilities. Artists in their several arts. The fair sex in their beauty and attractions, and in the respect paid them by the other sex.

33. The subjects of this chapter were prepared in a discussion question to the Glasgow Literary Society, 2/I/11; cf. this Essay, Part II, Chap. 1, note 1.
34. See, e.g., Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, Part I (*Human Nature*), Chap. ix, §21.

In every political society, from a petty corporation up to the national administration, there is a rivalship for power and influence.

Men have a natural desire of power without respect to the power of others. This we call *ambition*. But the desire of superiority, either in power, or in any thing we think worthy of estimation, has a respect to rivals, and is what we properly call *emulation*.

The stronger the desire is, the more pungent will be the uneasiness of being found behind, and the mind will be the more hurt by this humiliating view.

Emulation has a manifest tendency to improvement. Without it life would stagnate, and the discoveries of art and genius would be at a stand. This principle produces a constant fermentation in society, by which, though dregs may be produced, the better part is purified and exalted to a perfection, which it could not otherwise attain.

We have not sufficient *data* for a comparison of the good and bad effects which this principle actually produces in society; but there is ground to think of this, as of other natural principles, that the good overbalances the ill. As far as it is under the dominion of reason and virtue, its effects are always good; when left to be guided by passion and folly, they are often very bad.

‹169› Reason directs us to strive for superiority, only in things that have real excellence, otherwise we spend our labour for that which profiteth not.[35] To value ourselves for superiority in things that have no real worth, or none compared with what they cost, is to be vain of our own folly; and to be uneasy at the superiority of others in such things, is no less ridiculous.

Reason directs us to strive for superiority only in things in our power, and attainable by our exertion, otherwise we shall be like the frog in the fable, who swelled herself till she burst, in order to equal the ox in magnitude.[36]

To check all desire of things not attainable, and every uneasy thought in the want of them, is an obvious dictate of prudence, as well as of virtue and religion.

If emulation be regulated by such maxims of reason, and all undue partiality to ourselves be laid aside, it will be a powerful principle of our improvement, without hurt to any other person. It will give strength to the

35. Reid alludes to Isaiah 58:9.
36. See Aesop's *Fables*, 'The Frog and the Ox'.

nerves, and vigour to the mind, in every noble and manly pursuit.

But dismal are its effects, when it is not under the direction of reason and virtue. It has often the most malignant influence on mens opinions, on their affection, and on their actions.

It is an old observation, that affection follows opinion; and it is undoubtedly true in many cases. A man cannot be grateful without the opinion of a favour done him. He cannot have deliberate resentment without the opinion of an injury; nor esteem without the opinion of some estimable quality; nor compassion without the opinion of suffering.

But it is no less true, that opinion sometimes follows affection, not that it ought, but that it actually does so, by giving a false ‹170› bias to our judgment. We are apt to be partial to our friends, and still more to ourselves.

Hence the desire of superiority leads men to put an undue estimation upon those things wherein they excel, or think they excel. And, by this means, pride may feed itself upon the very dregs of human nature.

The same desire of superiority may lead men to undervalue those things wherein they either despair of excelling, or care not to make the exertion necessary for that end. The grapes are sour, said the fox, when he saw them beyond this reach.[37] The same principle leads men to detract from the merit of others, and to impute their brightest actions to mean or bad motives.

He who runs a race feels uneasiness at seeing another outstrip him. This is uncorrupted nature, and the work of GOD within him. But this uneasiness may produce either of two very different effects. It may incite him to make more vigorous exertions, and to strain every nerve to get before his rival. This is fair and honest emulation. This is the effect it is intended to produce. But if he has not fairness and candour of heart, he will look with an evil eye upon his competitor, and will endeavour to trip him, or to throw a stumbling-block in his way. This is pure envy, the most malignant passion that can lodge in the human breast; which devours, as its natural food, the fame and the happiness of those who are most deserving of our esteem.

If there be, in some men, a proneness to detract from the character, even of persons unknown or indifferent, in others an avidity to hear and to propagate scandal, to what principle in human nature must we ascribe these qualities? The failings of others surely add nothing to our worth, nor

37. Reid alludes to Aesop's fable 'The Fox and the Grapes'.

are they, in themselves, a pleasant subject of thought or of discourse. But they ‹171› flatter pride, by giving an opinion of our superiority to those from whom we detract.

Is it not possible, that the same desire of superiority may have some secret influence upon those who love to display their eloquence in declaiming upon the corruption of human nature, and the wickedness, fraud and insincerity of mankind in general? It ought always to be taken for granted, that the declaimer is an exception to the general rule, otherwise he would rather chuse, even for his own sake, to draw a veil over the nakedness of his species. But, hoping that his audience will be so civil as not to include him in the black description, he rises superior by the depression of the species, and stands alone, like NOAH in the antediluvian world. This looks like envy against the human race.

It would be endless, and no ways agreeable, to enumerate all the evils and all the vices which passion and folly beget upon emulation. Here, as in most cases, the corruption of the best things is the worst. [38] In brute-animals, emulation has little matter to work upon, and its effects, good or bad, are few. It may produce battles of cocks and battles of bulls, and little else that is observable. But in mankind, it has an infinity of matter to work upon, and its good or bad effects, according as it is well or ill regulated and directed, multiply in proportion.

The conclusion to be drawn from what has been said upon this principle is, That emulation, as far as it is a part of our constitution, is highly useful and important in society; that in the wise and good, it produces the best effects without any harm; but in the foolish and vicious, it is the parent of a great part of the evils of life, and of the most malignant vices that stain human nature.

We are next to consider resentment.

‹172› Nature disposes us, when we are hurt, to resist and retaliate. Beside the bodily pain occasioned by the hurt, the mind is ruffled, and a desire raised to retaliate upon the author of the hurt or injury. This, in general, is what we call *anger* or *resentment*.

A very important distinction is made by Bishop BUTLER between sudden resentment, which is a blind impulse arising from our constitution, and that which is deliberate. The first may be raised by hurt of any kind; but the last can only be raised by injury real or conceived.[39]

38. ‘Corruptio optimi pessima’ was an ancient Roman proverb.
39. See Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, Sermon 8 (‘Upon Resentment’).

The same distinction is made by Lord KAMES in his *Elements of Criticism* What BUTLER calls *sudden*, he calls *instinctive*.[40]

We have not, in common language, different names for these different kinds of resentment; but the distinction is very necessary, in order to our having just notions of this part of the human constitution. It corresponds perfectly with the distinction I have made between the animal and rational principles of action. For this sudden or instinctive resentment, is an animal principle common to us with brute-animals. But that resentment which the authors I have named call *deliberate*, must fall under the class of rational principles.

It is to be observed, however, that, by referring it to that class, I do not mean, that it is always kept within the bounds that reason prescribes, but only that it is proper to man as a reasonable being, capable, by his rational faculties, of distinguishing between hurt and injury; a distinction which no brute-animal can make.

Both these kinds of resentment are raised, whether the hurt or injury be done to ourselves, or to those we are interested in.

‹173› Wherever there is any benevolent affection towards others, we resent their wrongs, in proportion to the strength of our affection. Pity and sympathy with the sufferer, produce resentment against the author of the suffering, as naturally as concern for ourselves produces resentment of our own wrongs.

I shall first consider that resentment which I call *animal*, which BUTLER calls *sudden*, and Lord KAMES *instinctive*.

In every animal to which nature hath given the power of hurting its enemy, we see an endeavour to retaliate the ill that is done to it. Even a mouse will bite when it cannot run away.

Perhaps there may be some animals to whom nature hath given no offensive weapon. To such, anger and resentment would be of no use; and I believe we shall find, that they never shew any sign of it. But there are few of this kind.

Some of the more sagacious animals can be provoked to fierce anger, and retain it long. Many of them shew great animosity in defending their young, who hardly shew any in defending themselves. Others resist every assault made upon the flock or herd to which they belong. Bees defend their hive, wild beasts their den, and birds their nest.

40. See Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, Chap. 2, Section 6, p. 63.

This sudden resentment operates in a similar manner in men and in brutes, and appears to be given by nature to both for the same end, namely, for defence, even in cases where there is no time for deliberation. It may be compared to that natural instinct, by which a man, who has lost his balance and begins to fall, makes a sudden and violent effort to recover himself, without any intention or deliberation.

In such efforts, men often exert a degree of muscular strength ‹174› beyond what they are able to exert by a calm determination of the will, and thereby save themselves from many a dangerous fall.

By a like violent and sudden impulse, nature prompts us to repel hurt upon the cause of it, whether it be man or beast. The instinct before mentioned is solely defensive, and is prompted by fear. This sudden resentment is offensive, and is prompted by anger, but with a view to defence.

Man, in his present state, is surrounded with so many dangers from his own species, from brute-animals, from every thing around him, that he has need of some defensive armour that shall always be ready in the moment of danger. His reason is of great use for this purpose, when there is time to apply it. But, in many cases, the mischief would be done before reason could think of the means of preventing it.

The wisdom of nature hath provided two means to supply this defect of our reason. One of these is the instinct before mentioned, by which the body, upon the appearance of danger, is instantly, and without thought or intention, put in that posture which is proper for preventing the danger, or lessening it. Thus, we wink hard when our eyes are threatened; we bend the body to avoid a stroke; we make a sudden effort to recover our balance, when in danger of falling. By such means we are guarded from many dangers which our reason would come too late to prevent.

But as offensive arms are often the surest means of defence, by deterring the enemy from an assault, nature hath also provided man, and other animals, with this kind of defence, by that sudden resentment of which we now speak, which outruns the quickest determinations of reason, and takes fire in an instant, threatening the enemy with retaliation.

‹175› The first of these principles operates upon the defender only; but this operates both upon the defender and the assailant, inspiring the former with courage and animosity, and striking terror into the latter. It proclaims to all assailants, what our ancient Scottish kings did upon their coins, by the emblem of a thistle, with this motto, *Nemo me impune*

lacesset.[41] By this, in innumerable cases, men and beasts are deterred from doing hurt, and others thereby secured from suffering it.

But as resentment supposes an object on whom we may retaliate, how comes it to pass, that in brutes very often, and sometimes in our own species, we see it wreaked upon inanimate things, which are incapable of suffering by it?

Perhaps it might be a sufficient answer to this question, That nature acts by general laws, which, in some particular cases, may go beyond, or fall short of their intention, though they be ever so well adapted to it in general.

But I confess it seems to me impossible, that there should be resentment against a thing, which at that very moment is considered as inanimate, and consequently incapable either of intending hurt, or of being punished. For what can be more absurd, than to be angry with the knife for cutting me, or with the weight for falling upon my toes? There must therefore, I conceive, be some momentary notion or conception that the object of our resentment is capable of punishment; and if it be natural, before reflection, to be angry with things inanimate, it seems to be a necessary consequence, that it is natural to think that they have life and feeling.

Several phænomena in human nature lead us to conjecture that, in the earliest period of life, we are apt to think every object about us to be animated. Judging of them by ourselves, we ascribe to them the feelings we are conscious of in ourselves. ‹176› So we see a little girl judges of her doll and of her play-things. And so we see rude nations judge of the heavenly bodies, of the elements, and of the sea, rivers, and fountains.

If this be so, it ought not to be said, that by reason and experience, we learn to ascribe life and intelligence to things which we before considered as inanimate. It ought rather to be said, That by reason and experience we learn that certain things are inanimate, to which at first we ascribed life and intelligence.

If this be true, it is less surprising that, before reflection, we should for a moment relapse into this prejudice of our early years, and treat things as if they had life, which we once believed to have it.

It does not much affect our present argument, whether this be, or be

41. Transl. ‘No one harms me with impunity.’ This is the motto of the Order of the Thistle and appeared first on the ‘Thistle’ dollar in 1579. Cf. Reid’s use of it in a lecture, *Practical Ethics*, p. 67 and note.

not the cause, why a dog pursues and gnashes at the stone that hurt him; and why a man in a passion, for losing at play, sometimes wreaks his vengeance on the cards or dice.

It is not strange that a blind animal impulse should sometimes lose its proper direction. In brutes this has no bad consequence; in men the least ray of reflection corrects it, and shews its absurdity.

It is sufficiently evident, upon the whole, that this sudden, or animal resentment, is intended by nature for our defence. It prevents mischief by the fear of punishment. It is a kind of penal statute, promulgated by nature, the execution of which is committed to the sufferer.

It may be expected indeed, that one who judges in his own cause, will be disposed to seek more than an equitable redress. But this disposition is checked by the resentment of the other party.

‹177› Yet, in the state of nature, injuries once begun, will often be reciprocated between the parties, until mortal enmity is produced, and each party thinks himself safe only in the destruction of his enemy.

This right of redressing and punishing our own wrongs, so apt to be abused, is one of those natural rights, which, in political society, is given up to the laws, and to the civil magistrate; and this indeed is one of the capital advantages we reap from the political union, that the evils arising from ungoverned resentment are in a great degree prevented.

Although deliberate resentment does not properly belong to the class of animal principles; yet, as both have the same name, and are distinguished only by Philosophers, and as in real life they are commonly intermixed, I shall here make some remarks upon it.

A small degree of reason and reflection teaches a man that injury only, and not mere hurt, is a just object of resentment to a rational creature. A man may suffer grievously by the hand of another, not only without injury, but with the most friendly intention; as in the case of a painful chirurgical operation. Every man of common sense sees, that to resent such suffering, is not the part of a man, but of a brute.

Mr Locke mentions a gentleman who, having been cured of madness by a very harsh and offensive operation, with great sense of gratitude, owned the cure as the greatest obligation he could have received, but could never bear the sight of the operator, because it brought back the idea of that agony which he had endured from his hands.[42]

In this case we see distinctly the operation both of the animal, and

42. See *Essay*, II.xxxiii.14: p. 399.

of the rational principle. The first produced an aver‹178›sion to the operator, which reason was not able to overcome; and probably in a weak mind, might have produced lasting resentment and hatred. But, in this gentleman, reason so far prevailed, as to make him sensible that gratitude, and not resentment, was due.

Suffering may give a bias to the judgment, and make us apprehend injury where no injury is done. But, I think, without an apprehension of injury, there can be no deliberate resentment.

Hence, among enlightened nations, hostile armies fight without anger or resentment. The vanquished are not treated as offenders, but as brave men who have fought for their country unsuccessfully, and who are entitled to every office of humanity consistent with the safety of the conquerors.

If we analyze that deliberate resentment which is proper to rational creatures, we shall find that though it agrees with that which is merely animal in some respects, it differs in others. Both are accompanied with an uneasy sensation, which disturbs the peace of the mind. Both prompt us to seek redress of our sufferings, and security from harm. But, in deliberate resentment, there must be an opinion of injury done or intended. And an opinion of injury implies an idea of justice, and consequently a moral faculty.

The very notion of an injury is, that it is less than we may justly claim; as, on the contrary, the notion of a favour is, that it is more than we can justly claim. Whence it is evident, that justice is the standard, by which both a favour, and an injury, are to be weighed and estimated. Their very nature and definition consist in their exceeding or falling short of this standard. No man therefore, can have the idea either of a favour or of an injury, who has not the idea of justice.

‹179› That very idea of justice which enters into cool and deliberate resentment, tends to restrain its excesses. For as there is injustice in doing an injury, so there is injustice in punishing it beyond measure.

To a man of candour and reflection, consciousness of the frailty of human nature, and that he has often stood in need of forgiveness himself, the pleasure of renewing good understanding, after it has been interrupted, the inward approbation of a generous and forgiving disposition, and even the irksomeness and uneasiness of a mind ruffled by resentment, plead strongly against its excesses.

Upon the whole, when we consider, That, on the one hand, every benevolent affection is pleasant in its nature, is health to the soul, and a

cordial to the spirits; That nature has made even the outward expression of benevolent affections in the countenance, pleasant to every beholder, and the chief ingredient of beauty in the*human face divine*;[43] That, on the other hand, every malevolent affection, not only in its faulty excesses, but in its moderate degrees, is vexation and disquiet to the mind, and even gives deformity to the countenance, it is evident that, by these signals, nature loudly admonishes us to use the former as our daily bread, both for health and pleasure, but to consider the latter as a nauseous medicine, which is never to be taken without necessity; and even then in no greater quantity than the necessity requires.

‹180›

CHAP. VI.

Of Passion.[44]

BEFORE I proceed to consider the rational principles of action, it is proper to observe, that there are some things belonging to the mind, which have great influence upon human conduct, by exciting or allaying, inflaming or cooling the animal principles we have mentioned.

Three of this kind deserve particular consideration. I shall call them by the names of *passion, disposition, and opinion.*

The meaning of the word*passion* is not precisely ascertained, either in common discourse, or in the writings of Philosophers.

I think it is commonly put to signify some agitation of mind, which is opposed to that state of tranquillity, and composure, in which a man is most master of himself.

The word *παθος*, which answers to it in the Greek language, is, by CICERO, rendered by the word *perturbatio*.[45]

It has always been conceived to bear analogy to a storm at sea, or to a tempest in the air. It does not therefore signify any thing in the mind that is constant and permanent, but something that is occasional, and has a limited duration, like a storm or tempest.

43. The phrase ‘human face divine’ comes from Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book III, l. 44.
44. The subjects of this and the two following chapters were presented in a paper to the Glasgow Literary Society, 2/I/12 and 2/I/14, 9–14; cf. this Essay, Part II, Chap. 1, note 1.
45. Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes*, 4.5.10.

Passion commonly produces sensible effects even upon the body. It changes the voice, the features, and the gesture. The external signs of passion have, in some cases, a great resemblance to those of madness; in others, to those of melancholy. It gives of‹181›ten a degree of muscular force and agility to the body, far beyond what it possesses in calm moments.

The effects of passion upon the mind are not less remarkable. It turns the thoughts involuntarily to the objects related to it, so that a man can hardly think of any thing else. It gives often a strange bias to the judgment, making a man quicksighted in every thing that tends to inflame his passion, and to justify it, but blind to every thing that tends to moderate and allay it. Like a magic lanthorn, it raises up spectres and apparitions that have no reality, and throws false colours upon every object. It can turn deformity into beauty, vice into virtue, and virtue into vice.

The sentiments of a man under its influence will appear absurd and ridiculous, not only to other men, but even to himself when the storm is spent and is succeeded by a calm. Passion often gives a violent impulse to the will, and makes a man do what he knows he shall repent as long as he lives.

That such are the effects of passion, I think all men agree. They have been described in lively colours by poets, orators and moralists, in all ages. But men have given more attention to the effects of passion than to its nature; and while they have copiously and elegantly described the former, they have not precisely defined the latter.

The controversy between the ancient Peripatetics and the Stoics, with regard to the passions, was probably owing to their affixing different meanings to the word. The one sect maintained, that the passions are good, and useful parts of our constitution, while they are held under the government of reason. The other sect, conceiving that nothing is to be called passion which does not, in some degree, cloud and darken the understanding, considered all passion as hostile to reason, and therefore maintained ‹182› that, in the wise man, passion should have no existence, but be utterly exterminated.[46]

If both sects had agreed about the definition of passion, they would probably have had no difference. But while one considered passion only as the cause of those bad effects which it often produces, and the other considered it as fitted by nature to produce good effects, while it is under

46. For this dispute, see, e.g., Cicero, *De finibus*, Books IV and V.

subjection to reason, it does not appear that what one sect justified, was the same thing which the other condemned. Both allowed that no dictate of passion ought to be followed in opposition to reason. Their difference therefore was verbal more than real, and was owing to their giving different meanings to the same word.

The precise meaning of this word seems not to be more clearly ascertained among modern Philosophers.

Mr HUME gives the name of *passion* to every principle of action in the human mind; and, in consequence of this maintains, that every man is, and ought to be led by his passions, and that the use of reason is to be subservient to the passions.[47]

Dr HUTCHESON, considering all the principles of action as so many determinations or motions of the will, divides them into the calm and turbulent.[48] The turbulent, he says, are our appetites and our passions. Of the passions, as well as of the calm determinations, he says, that 'some are benevolent, others are selfish; that anger, envy, indignation, and some others, may be either selfish or benevolent, according as they arise from some opposition to our own interests, or to those of our friends, or persons beloved or esteemed.'[49]

It appears, therefore, that this excellent author gives the name of *passions*, not to every principle of action, but to some, and to‹183› those only when they are turbulent and vehement, not when they are calm and deliberate.

Our natural desires and affections may be so calm as to leave room for reflection, so that we find no difficulty in deliberating coolly, whether, in such a particular instance, they ought to be gratified or not. On other occasions, they may be so importunate as to make deliberation very difficult, urging us, by a kind of violence, to their immediate gratification.

Thus, a man may be sensible of an injury without being inflamed. He judges coolly of the injury, and of the proper means of redress. This is resentment without passion. It leaves to the man the entire command of himself.

47. See *Treatise*, 2.3.3 ('Of the influencing motives of the will').
48. In his suggested revisions to the final manuscript (1/II/2, 76) Dugald Stewart objects to this statement: 'Dr. Hutcheson seems not to have held this opinion Uniformly. He illustrates what he calls undesigning propensities, in Essay on the Passions §3', i.e., *Essay*, pp. 51–2. On this occasion Reid ignored the advice.
49. This is not a quotation, but a paraphrase of Hutcheson, *Philosophiae moralis institutio / Short Introduction*, I.i.6–7.

On another occasion, the same principle of resentment rises into a flame. His blood boils within him; his looks, his voice and his gesture are changed; he can think of nothing but immediate revenge, and feels a strong impulse, without regard to consequences, to say and do things which his cool reason cannot justify. This is the passion of resentment.

What has been said of resentment may easily be applied to other natural desires and affections. When they are so calm as neither to produce any sensible effects upon the body, nor to darken the understanding and weaken the power of self-command, they are not called passions. But the same principle, when it becomes so violent as to produce these effects upon the body and upon the mind, is a passion, or, as CICERO very properly calls it, a perturbation.

It is evident, that this meaning of the word *passion* accords much better with its common use in language, than that which Mr HUME gives it.

‹184› When he says, that men ought to be governed by their passions only, and that the use of reason is to be subservient to the passions, this, at first hearing, appears a shocking paradox, repugnant to good morals and to common sense; but, like most other paradoxes, when explained according to his meaning, it is nothing but an abuse of words.

For if we give the name of *passion* to every principle of action, in every degree, and give the name of *reason* solely to the power of discerning the fitness of means to ends, it will be true, that the use of reason is to be subservient to the passions.

As I wish to use words as agreeably as possible to their common use in language, I shall, by the word *passion* mean, not any principle of action distinct from those desires and affections before explained, but such a degree of vehemence in them, or in any of them, as is apt to produce those effects upon the body or upon the mind which have been above described.

Our appetites, even when vehement, are, not I think, very commonly called passions, yet they are capable of being inflamed to rage, and in that case their effects are very similar to those of the passions; and what is said of one may be applied to both.

Having explained what I mean by passions, I think it unnecessary to enter into any enumeration of them, since they differ, not in kind, but rather in degree, from the principles already enumerated.[50]

50. In a brief résumé of Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. I, ch. 2, Reid pays attention to Kames' idea of the relationship between emotion, passion and desire; see 8/III/4, 13. In the *Essays on the Active Powers* he rarely uses 'emotion'.

The common division of the passions into desire and aversion, hope and fear, joy and grief, has been mentioned almost by every author who has treated of them, and needs no explication. But we may observe, that these are ingredients or modifications, ‹185› not of the passions only, but of every principle of action, animal and rational.

All of them imply the desire of some object; and the desire of an object cannot be without aversion to its contrary; and, according as the object is present or absent, desire and aversion will be variously modified into joy or grief, hope or fear. It is evident, that desire and aversion, joy and grief, hope and fear, may be either calm and sedate, or vehement and passionate.

Passing these, therefore, as common to all principles of action, whether calm or vehement, I shall only make some observations on passion in general, which tend to shew its influence on human conduct.

First, It is passion that makes us liable to strong temptations. Indeed, if we had no passions, we should hardly be under any temptation to wrong conduct. For, when we view things calmly, and free from any of the false colours which passion throws upon them, we can hardly fail to see the right and the wrong, and to see that the first is more eligible than the last. I believe a cool and deliberate preference of ill to good is never the first step into vice.

'When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her and he did eat; and the eyes of them both were opened.[51] Inflamed desire had blinded the eyes of their understanding.

> Fix'd on the fruit she gaz'd, which to behold
> Might tempt alone; and in her ears the sound
> ‹186› Yet rung of his persuasive words impregn'd
> With reason to her seeming, and with truth.
> — Fair to the eye, inviting to the taste,
> Of virtue to make wise, what hinders then
> To reach and feed at once both body and mind. MILTON.[52]

Thus our first parents were tempted to disobey their Maker, and all

51. Genesis 3:6.
52. *Paradise Lost*, Book IX, ll. 735–8, 777–9.

their posterity are liable to temptation from the same cause. Passion, or violent appetite, first blinds the understanding, and then perverts the will.

It is passion, therefore, and the vehement motions of appetite, that makes us liable, in our present state, to strong temptations to deviate from our duty. This is the lot of human nature in the present period of our existence.

Human virtue must gather strength by struggle and effort. As infants, before they can walk without stumbling, must be exposed to many a fall and bruise; as wrestlers acquire their strength and agility by many a combat and violent exertion; so it is in the noblest powers of human nature, as well as the meanest, and even in virtue itself.

It is not only made manifest by temptation and trial, but by these means it acquires its strength and vigour.

Men must acquire patience by suffering, and fortitude by being exposed to danger, and every other virtue by situations that put it to trial and exercise.

This, for any thing we know, may be necessary in the nature of things. It is certainly a law of nature with regard to man.

Whether there may be orders of intelligent and moral creatures who never were subject to any temptation, nor had their‹187› virtue put to any trial, we cannot without presumption determine. But it is evident, that this neither is, nor ever was the lot of man, not even in the state of innocence.

Sad, indeed, would be the condition of man, if the temptations to which, by the constitution of his nature, and by his circumstances, he is liable, were irresistible. Such a state would not at all be a state of trial and discipline.

Our condition here is such, that, on the one hand, passion often tempts and solicits us to do wrong; on the other hand, reason and conscience oppose the dictates of passion. The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.[53] And upon the issue of this conflict, the character of the man and his fate depend.

If reason be victorious, his virtue is strengthened; he has the inward satisfaction of having fought a good fight in behalf of his duty, and the peace of his mind is preserved.

If, on the other hand, passion prevails against the sense of duty, the man is conscious of having done what he ought not, and might not have done. His own heart condemns him, and he is guilty to himself.

53. Reid quotes from Galatians 5:17.

This conflict between the passions of our animal nature and the calm dictates of reason and conscience, is not a theory invented to solve the phænomena of human conduct, it is a fact, of which every man who attends to his own conduct is conscious.

In the most ancient philosophy, of which we have any account, I mean that of the Pythagorean school, the mind of man was compared to a state, or commonwealth, in which there are ‹188› various powers, some that ought to govern, and others that ought to be subordinate.[54]

The good of the whole, which is the supreme law in this, as in every commonwealth, requires that this subordination be preserved, and that the governing powers have always the ascendant over the appetites and passions. All wise and good conduct consists in this. All folly and vice in the prevalence of passion over the dictates of reason.

This philosophy was adopted by PLATO; and it is so agreeable to what every man feels in himself, that it must always prevail with men who think without bias to a system.

The governing powers, of which these ancient Philosophers speak, are the same which I call the *rational* principles of action, and which I shall have occasion to explain. [55] I only mention them here, because, without a regard to them, the influence of the passions, and their rank in our constitution, cannot be distinctly understood.

A *second* observation is, That the impulse of passion is not always to what is bad, but very often to what is good, and what our reason approves. There are some passions, as Dr HUTCHESON observes, that are benevolent, as well as others that are selfish.[56]

The affections of resentment and emulation, with those that spring from them, from their very nature, disturb and disquiet the mind, though they be not carried beyond the bounds which reason prescribes; and therefore they are commonly called passions, even in their moderate degrees. From a similar cause, the benevolent affections, which are placid in their nature, and are rarely carried beyond the bounds of reason, are very seldom called passions. We do not give the name of passion to bene‹189›volence, gratitude, or friendship. Yet we must except from this

54. Reid's main source for ancient philosophical 'sects' seems to have been Johann Jakob Brucker, *Historia philosophica*, from which he took notes, though not on the present topic; see 6/II/6, 1; cf. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* p. 28.
55. See below, this Essay, Part III.
56. See, e.g., Hutcheson, *Essay*, Treatise I, I.iii, p. 22; and *Philosophiae moralis institutio / Short Introduction*, I.i.7, pp. 30–2.

general rule, love between the sexes, which, as it commonly discomposes the mind, and is not easily kept within reasonable bounds, is always called a passion.

All our natural desires and affections are good and necessary parts of our constitution; and passion, being only a certain degree of vehemence in these, its natural tendency is to good, and it is by accident that it leads us wrong.

Passion is very properly said to be blind. It looks not beyond the present gratification. It belongs to reason to attend to the accidental circumstances which may sometimes make that gratification improper or hurtful. When there is no impropriety in it, much more when it is our duty, passion aids reason, and gives additional force to its dictates.

Sympathy with the distressed may bring them a charitable relief, when a calm sense of duty would be too weak to produce the effect.

Objects, either good or ill, conceived to be very distant, when they are considered coolly, have not that influence upon men which in reason they ought to have. Imagination, like the eye, diminisheth its objects in proportion to their distance. The passions of hope and fear must be raised, in order to give such objects their due magnitude in the imagination, and their due influence upon our conduct.

The dread of disgrace and of the civil magistrate, and the apprehension of future punishment, prevent many crimes, which bad men, without these restraints, would commit, and contribute greatly to the peace and good order of society.

There is no bad action which some passion may not prevent;‹190› nor is there any external good action, of which some passion may not be the main spring; and, it is very probable, that even the passions of men, upon the whole, do more good to society than hurt.

The ill that is done draws our attention more, and is imputed solely to human passions. The good may have better motives, and charity leads us to think that it has; but, as we see not the heart, it is impossible to determine what share men's passions may have in its production.

The *last* observation is, That if we distinguish, in the effects of our passions, those which are altogether involuntary, and without the sphere of our power, from the effects which may be prevented by an exertion, perhaps a great exertion, of self-government; we shall find the first to be good and highly useful, and the last only to be bad.

Not to speak of the effects of moderate passions upon the health of the body, to which some agitation of this kind seems to be no less useful than

storms and tempests to the salubrity of the air; every passion naturally draws our attention to its object, and interests us in it.

The mind of man is naturally desultory, and when it has no interesting object in view, roves from one to another, without fixing its attention upon any one. A transient and careless glance is all that we bestow upon objects in which we take no concern. It requires a strong degree of curiosity, or some more important passion, to give us that interest in an object which is necessary to our giving attention to it. And, without attention, we can form no true and stable judgment of any object.

Take away the passions, and it is not easy to say how great ‹191› a part of mankind would resemble those frivolous mortals, who never had a thought that engaged them in good earnest.

It is not mere judgment or intellectual ability that enables a man to excel in any art or science. He must have a love and admiration of it bordering upon enthusiasm, or a passionate desire of the fame, or of some other advantage to be got by that excellence. Without this, he would not undergo the labour and fatigue of his faculties, which it requires. So that, I think, we may with justice allow no small merit to the passions, even in the discoveries and improvements of the arts and sciences.

If the passions for fame and distinction were extinguished, it would be difficult to find men ready to undertake the cares and toils of government; and few perhaps would make the exertion necessary to raise themselves above the ignoble vulgar.

The involuntary signs of the passions and dispositions of the mind, in the voice, features, and action, are a part of the human constitution which deserves admiration. The signification of those signs is known to all men by nature, and previous to all experience.

They are so many openings into the souls of our fellow-men, by which their sentiments become visible to the eye. They are a natural language common to mankind, without which it would have been impossible to have invented any artificial language.[57]

It is from the natural signs of the passions and dispositions of the mind, that the human form derives its beauty; that painting, poetry, and music, derive their expression; that eloquence derives it greatest force, and conversation its greatest charm.

The passions, when kept within their proper bounds, give life and

57. Reid introduces a distinction between natural and artificial languages in *Inquiry*, Chap. 4, Section II, pp. 50–3; see also pp. 171–2 and 190–2.

vigour to the whole man. Without them man would be a slug. ‹192› We see what polish and animation the passion of love, when honourable and not unsuccessful, gives to both sexes.

The passion for military glory raises the brave commander in the day of battle, far above himself, making his countenance to shine, and his eyes to sparkle. The glory of old England warms the heart even of the British tar, and makes him despise every danger.

As to the bad effects of passion, it must be acknowledged that it often gives a strong impulse to what is bad, and what a man condemns himself for, as soon as it is done. But he must be conscious that the impulse, though strong, was not irresistible, otherwise he could not condemn himself.

We allow that a sudden and violent passion, into which a man is surprised, alleviates a bad action; but if it was irresistible, it would not only alleviate, but totally exculpate, which it never does, either in the judgment of the man himself, or of others.

To sum up all, passion furnishes a very strong instance of the truth of the common maxim, That the corruption of the best things is worst.

CHAP. VII.

Of Disposition.[58]

By *disposition* I mean a state of mind which, while it lasts, gives a tendency, or proneness, to be moved by certain animal principles, rather than by others; while, at another time, another state of mind, in the same person, may give the ascendant to other animal principles.

‹193› It was before observed, that it is a property of our appetites to be periodical, ceasing for a time, when sated by their objects, and returning regularly after certain periods.

Even those principles which are not periodical, have their ebbs and flows occasionally, according to the present disposition of the mind.

Among some of the principles of action there is a natural affinity, so that one of the tribe naturally disposes to those which are allied to it.

Such an affinity has been observed by many good authors to be among all the benevolent affections. The exercise of one benevolent affection gives a proneness to the exercise of others.

58. See note 44, p. 133.

There is a certain placid and agreeable tone of mind which is common to them all, which seems to be the bond of that connection and affinity they have with one another.

The malevolent affections have also an affinity, and mutually dispose to each other, by means, perhaps, of that disagreeable feeling common to them all, which makes the mind sore and uneasy.

As far as we can trace the causes of the different dispositions of the mind, they seem to be in some cases owing to those associating powers of the principles of action, which have a natural affinity, and are prone to keep company with one another; sometimes to accidents of good or bad fortune, and sometimes, no doubt, the state of the body may have influence upon the disposition of the mind.

At one time the state of the mind, like a serene unclouded sky, shews every thing in the most agreeable light. Then a man ‹194› is prone to benevolence, compassion, and every kind affection; unsuspicious, not easily provoked.

The Poets have observed that men have their *mollia tempora fandi*,[59] when they are averse from saying or doing a harsh thing; and artful men watch these occasions, and know how to improve them to promote their ends.

This disposition, I think, we commonly call *good humour*, of which, in the fair sex, Mr POPE says,

> Good humour only teaches charms to last,
> Still makes new conquests, and maintains the past.[60]

There is no disposition more comfortable to the person himself, or more agreeable to others, than good humour. It is to the mind, what good health is to the body, putting a man in the capacity of enjoying every thing that is agreeable in life, and of using every faculty without clog or impediment. It disposes to contentment with our lot, to benevolence to all men, to sympathy with the distressed. It presents every object in the most

59. Transl. 'Times favourable for speaking.'
60. 'Epistle to Miss Blount with the Works of Voiture', ll. 61–2. In the minutes from his youthful philosophical club's discussion of 'Instincts, Senses and Desires', Reid noted with reference to 'Mr Hutchesons treatise on the Passions': 'A Sensation not taken Notice of By him or any other viz. that temper of Mind occasioned by a Disorder of the Animal Frame that uneasiness unaptness for thought and restlessness in hazy weather and Easterly Winds & its Contrary – This may be called Good or Bad Humor – Melancholy The Sensation occasioned by taking Opium.' 6/I/17, 2.

favourable light, and disposes us to avoid giving or taking offence.

This happy disposition seems to be the natural fruit of a good conscience, and a firm belief that the world is under a wise and benevolent administration; and, when it springs from this root, it is an habitual sentiment of piety.

Good humour is likewise apt to be produced by happy success, or unexpected good fortune. Joy and hope are favourable to it; vexation and disappointment are unfavourable.

The only danger of this disposition seems to be, That if we are not upon our guard, it may degenerate into levity, and ‹195› indispose us to a proper degree of caution, and of attention to the future consequences of our actions.

There is a disposition opposite to good humour which we call *bad humour*, of which the tendency is directly contrary, and therefore its influence is as malignant, as that of the other is salutary.

Bad humour alone is sufficient to make a man unhappy; it tinges every object with its own dismal colour; and, like a part that is galled, is hurt by every thing that touches it. It takes offence where none was meant, and disposes to discontent, jealousy, envy, and, in general, to malevolence.

Another couple of opposite dispositions are *elation* of mind, on the one hand, and *depression*, on the other.

These contrary dispositions are both of an ambiguous nature; their influence may be good or bad, according as they are grounded on true or false opinion, and according as they are regulated.

That elation of mind which arises from a just sense of the dignity of our nature, and of the powers and faculties with which GOD hath endowed us, is true magnanimity, and disposes a man to the noblest virtues, and the most heroic actions and enterprises.

There is also an elation of mind, which arises from a consciousness of our worth and integrity, such as JOB felt, when he said, ‘Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me while I live.’ [61] This may be called the pride of virtue; but it is a noble pride. It makes a man dis‹196›dain to do what is base or mean. This is the true sense of honour.

But there is an elation of mind arising from a vain opinion of our having talents, or worth, which we have not; or from putting an undue value upon any of our endowments of mind, body, or fortune. This is pride, the parent of many odious vices; such as arrogance, undue

61. Job 27:6.

contempt of others, self-partiality, and vicious self-love.

The opposite disposition to elation of mind, is depression, which also has good or bad effects, according as it is grounded upon true or false opinion.

A just sense of the weakness and imperfections of human nature, and of our own personal faults and defects, is true humility. It is *not to think of ourselves above what we ought to think*;[62] a most salutary and amiable disposition; of great price in the sight of GOD and man. Nor is it inconsistent with real magnanimity and greatness of soul. They may dwell together with great advantage and ornament to both, and be faithful monitors against the extremes to which each has the greatest tendency.

But there is a depression of mind which is the opposite to magnanimity, which debilitates the springs of action, and freezes every sentiment that should lead to any noble exertion or enterprise.

Suppose a man to have no belief of a good administration of the world, no conception of the dignity of virtue, no hope of happiness in another state. Suppose him, at the same time, in a state of extreme poverty and dependence, and that he has no higher aim than to supply his bodily wants, or to minister to the pleasure, or flatter the pride of some being as worthless as himself. Is not the soul of such a man depressed as much as his ‹197› body or his fortune? And, if fortune should smile upon him while he retains the same sentiments, he is only the slave of fortune. His mind is depressed to the state of a brute; and his human faculties serve only to make him feel that depression.

Depression of mind may be owing to melancholy, a distemper of mind which proceeds from the state of the body, which throws a dismal gloom upon every object of thought, cuts all the sinews of action, and often gives rise to strange and absurd opinions in religion, or in other interesting matters. Yet, where there is real worth at bottom, some rays of it will break forth even in this depressed state of mind.

A remarkable instance of this was exhibited in Mr SIMON BROWN, a dissenting clergyman in England, who, by melancholy, was led into the belief that his rational soul had gradually decayed within him, and at last was totally extinct. From this belief he gave up his ministerial function, and would not even join with others in any act of worship, conceiving it to be a profanation to worship GOD without a soul.

In this dismal state of mind, he wrote an excellent defence of the

62. Reid alludes to Romans 12:3.

Christian religion, against TINDAL's *Christianity as old as the Creation.*[63] To the book he prefixed an epistle dedicatory to Queen CAROLINE, wherein he mentions, 'That he was once a man, but, by the immediate hand of GOD, for his sins, his very thinking substance has, for more than seven years, been continually wasting away, till it is wholly perished out of him, if it be not utterly come to nothing.' And, having heard of her Majesty's eminent piety, he begs the aid of her prayers.

The book was published after his death without the dedication, which, however, having been preserved in manuscript, was afterwards printed in the Adventurer, No. 88.[64]

‹198› Thus this good man, when he believed that he had no soul, shewed a most generous and disinterested concern for those who had souls.

As depression of mind may produce strange opinions, especially in the case of melancholy, so our opinions may have a very considerable influence, either to elevate or to depress the mind, even where there is no melancholy.

Suppose, on one hand, a man who believes that he is destined to an eternal existence; that he who made, and who governs the world, maketh account of him, and hath furnished him with the means of attaining a high degree of perfection and glory. With this man compare, on the other hand, the man who believes nothing at all, or who believes that his existence is only the play of atoms, and that, after he hath been tossed about by blind fortune for a few years, he shall again return to nothing: Can it be doubted, that the former opinion leads to elevation and greatness of mind, the latter to meanness and depression?

CHAP. VIII.

Of Opinion.[65]

WHEN we come to explain the rational principles of action, it will appear, that opinion is an essential ingredient in them. Here we are only to

63. Simon Browne, *A Defence of the Religion of Nature and the Christian Revelation; Against the Defective Account of the one, and the Exceptions against the other, in a Book, entitled, Christianity as old as the Creation*.
64. *The Adventurer*, no. 88 (8 September 1753); in *The Adventurer in Four Volumes* (London, 1777), vol. 3, pp. 149–57.
65. See note 44, p. 133.

consider its influence upon the animal principles. Some of those I have ranked in that class cannot, I think, exist in the human mind without it.

Gratitude supposes the opinion of a favour done or intended; resentment the opinion of an injury; esteem the opinion of merit; the passion of love supposes the opinion of uncommon merit and perfection in its object.

‹199› Although natural affection to parents, children, and near relations, is not grounded on the opinion of their merit, it is much increased by that consideration. So is every benevolent affection. On the contrary, real malevolence can hardly exist without the opinion of demerit in the object.

There is no natural desire or aversion, which may not be restrained by opinion. Thus, if a man were athirst, and had a strong desire to drink, the opinion that there was poison in the cup would make him forbear.

It is evident, that hope and fear, which every natural desire or affection may create, depend upon the opinion of future good or ill.

Thus it appears, that our passions, our dispositions, and our opinions, have great influence upon our animal principles, to strengthen or weaken, to excite or restrain them; and, by that means, have great influence upon human actions and characters.

That brute-animals have both passions and dispositions similar, in many respects, to those of men, cannot be doubted. Whether they have opinions, is not so clear. I think they have not, in the proper sense of the word. But, waving all dispute upon this point, it will be granted, that opinion in men has a much wider field than in brutes. No man will say, that they have systems of theology, morals, jurisprudence or politics; or that they can reason from the laws of nature, in mechanics, medicine, or agriculture.

They feel the evils or enjoyments that are present; probably they imagine those which experience has associated with what they feel. But they can take no large prospect either of the past or of the future, nor see through a train of consequences.

‹200› A dog may be deterred from eating what is before him, by the fear of immediate punishment, which he has felt on like occasions; but he is never deterred by the consideration of health, or of any distant good.

I have been credibly informed, that a monkey, having once been intoxicated with strong drink, in consequence of which it burnt its foot in the fire, and had a severe fit of sickness, could never after be induced to

drink any thing but pure water. I believe this is the utmost pitch which the faculties of brutes can reach.

From the influence of opinion upon the conduct of mankind we may learn, that it is one of the chief instruments to be used in the discipline and government of men.

All men, in the early part of life, must be under the discipline and government of parents and tutors. Men, who live in society, must be under the government of laws and magistrates, through life. The government of men is undoubtedly one of the noblest exertions of human power. And it is of great importance, that those who have any share, either in domestic or civil government, should know the nature of man, and how he is to be trained and governed.

Of all instruments of government, opinion is the sweetest, and the most agreeable to the nature of man. Obedience that flows from opinion, is real freedom, which every man desires. That which is extorted by fear of punishment, is slavery; a yoke which is always galling, and which every man will shake off when it is in his power.

The opinions of the bulk of mankind have always been, and will always be, what they are taught by those whom they esteem ‹201› to be wise and good; and, therefore, in a considerable degree, are in the power of those who govern them.

Man, uncorrupted by bad habits and bad opinions, is of all animals the most tractable; corrupted by these, he is of all animals the most untractable.

I apprehend, therefore, that, if ever civil government shall be brought to perfection, it must be the principal care of the state to make good citizens by proper education, and proper instruction and discipline.

The most useful part of medicine is that which strengthens the constitution, and prevents diseases by good regimen; the rest is somewhat like propping a ruinous fabric at great expence, and to little purpose. The art of government is the medicine of the mind, and the most useful part of it is that which prevents crimes and bad habits, and trains men to virtue and good habits, by proper education and discipline.

The end of government is to make the society happy, which can only be done by making it good and virtuous.

That men in general will be good or bad members of society, according to the education and discipline by which they have been trained, experience may convince us.

The present age has made great advances in the art of training men

to military duty. It will not be said, that those who enter into that service are more tractable than their fellow-subjects of other professions. And I know not why it should be thought impossible to train men to equal perfection in the other duties of good citizens.

What an immense difference is there, for the purpose of war, ‹202› between an army properly trained, and a militia hastily drawn out of the multitude? What should hinder us from thinking, that, for every purpose of civil government, there may be a like difference between a civil society properly trained to virtue, good habits and right sentiments, and those civil societies which we now behold? — But I fear I shall be thought to digress from my subject into Utopian speculation.[66]

To make an end of what I have to say upon the animal principles of action, we may take a complex view of their effect in life, by supposing a being actuated by principles of no higher order, to have no conscience or sense of duty, only let us allow him that superiority of understanding, and that power of self-government which man actually has. Let us speculate a little upon this imaginary being, and consider what conduct and tenor of action might be expected from him.

It is evident he would be a very different animal from a brute, and perhaps not very different, in appearance, from what a great part of mankind is.

He would be capable of considering the distant consequences of his actions, and of restraining or indulging his appetites, desires and affections, from the consideration of distant good or evil.

He would be capable of chusing some main end of his life, and planning such a rule of conduct as appeared most subservient to it. Of this we have reason to think no brute is capable.

We can perhaps conceive such a balance of the animal principles of action, as, with very little self-government, might make a man to be a good member of society, a good companion, and to have many amiable qualities.

‹203› The balance of our animal principles, I think, constitutes what we call a man's *natural temper;* which may be good or bad, without regard to his virtue.

A man in whom the benevolent affections, the desire of esteem and

66. Reid indulges in some Utopian speculation in the MS (Aberdeen University Library 3061/6) entitled 'Some Thoughts on the Utopian System'. This was published in Reid, *Practical Ethics* (Princeton edition 1990), pp. 277–99. A new edition will be included in *Thomas Reid on Society and Politics*.

good humour are naturally prevalent, who is of a calm and dispassionate nature, who has the good fortune to live with good men, and associate with good companions, may behave properly with little effort.

His natural temper leads him, in most cases, to do what virtue requires. And if he happens not to be exposed to those trying situations, in which virtue crosses the natural bent of his temper, he has no great temptation to act amiss.

But perhaps a happy natural temper, joined with such a happy situation, is more ideal than real, though no doubt some men make nearer approaches to it than others.

The temper and the situation of men is commonly such, that the animal principles alone, without self-government, would never produce any regular and consistent train of conduct.

One principle crosses another. Without self-government, that which is strongest at the time will prevail. And that which is weakest at one time may, from passion, from a change of disposition or of fortune, become strongest at another time.

Every natural appetite, desire and affection, has its own present gratification only in view. A man, therefore, who has no other leader than these, would be like a ship in the ocean without hands, which cannot be said to be destined to any port. He would have no character at all, but be benevolent or spiteful, pleasant or morose, honest or dishonest, as the present wind of passion or tide of humour moved him.

‹204› Every man who pursues an end, be it good or bad, must be active when he is disposed to be indolent; he must rein every passion and appetite that would lead him out of his road.

Mortification and self-denial are found not in the path of virtue only, they are common to every road that leads to an end, be it ambition, or avarice, or even pleasure itself. Every man who maintains an uniform and consistent character, must sweat and toil, and often struggle with his present inclination.

Yet those who steadily pursue some end in life, though they must often restrain their strongest desires, and practice much self-denial, have, upon the whole, more enjoyment than those who have no end at all, but to gratify the present prevailing inclination.

A dog that is made for the chase, cannot enjoy the happiness of a dog without that exercise. Keep him within doors, feed him with the most delicious fare, give him all the pleasures his nature is capable of, he soon becomes a dull, torpid, unhappy animal. No enjoyment can supply the

want of that employment which nature has made his chief good. Let him hunt, and neither pain nor hunger nor fatigue seem to be evils. Deprived of this exercise, he can relish nothing. Life itself becomes burdensome.

It is no disparagement to the human kind to say, that man, as well as the dog, is made for hunting, and cannot be happy but in some vigorous pursuit. He has indeed nobler game to pursue than the dog, but he must have some pursuit, otherwise life stagnates, all the faculties are benumbed, the spirits flag, and his existence becomes an unsupportable burden.

Even the mere foxhunter, who has no higher pursuit than his dogs, has more enjoyment than he who has no pursuit at all. ‹205› He has an end in view, and this invigorates his spirits, makes him despise pleasure, and bear cold, hunger and fatigue, as if they were no evils.

Manet sub Jove frigido
Venator, teneræ conjugis immemor,
Seu visa est catulis cerva fidelibus
Seu rupit teretes marsus aper plagas.[67]

67. Transl. ‘The huntsman, without a thought for his young wife, stays out beneath the freezing sky if a deer has been sighted by the faithful hounds, or a Marsian boar has broken through the fine-spun net’: Horace, *Odes*, Book 1.I, ll. 25–9, p. 25.

ESSAY III.

PART III.

Of the Rational Principles of Action.[68]

CHAP. I.

There are Rational Principles of Action in Man.

MECHANICAL principles of action produce their effect without any will or intention on our part. We may, by a voluntary effort, hinder the effect; but if it be not hindered by will and effort, it is produced without them.

Animal principles of action require intention and will in their operation, but not judgment. They are, by ancient moralists, very properly called *cæcæ cupidines*, blind desires.

Having treated of these two classes, I proceed to the third, the *rational* principles of action in man; which have that name, because they can have no existence in beings not endowed with reason, and, in all their exertions, require, not only intention and will, but judgment or reason.

‹206› That talent which we call *reason*, by which men that are adult and of a sound mind, are distinguished from brutes, idiots, and infants, has, in all ages, among the learned and unlearned, been conceived to have two offices, to regulate our belief, and to regulate our actions and conduct.

Whatever we believe, we think agreeable to reason, and, on that account, yield our assent to it. Whatever we disbelieve, we think contrary to reason, and, on that account, dissent from it. Reason therefore is allowed to be the principle by which our belief and opinions ought to be regulated.

But reason has been no less universally conceived to be a principle, by which our actions ought to be regulated.

To act reasonably, is a phrase no less common in all languages, than to judge reasonably. We immediately approve of a man's conduct, when it appears that he had good reason for what he did. And every action we disapprove, we think unreasonable, or contrary to reason.

68. The subjects of the first four chapters in this Part of the Essay were rehearsed in a paper to the Glasgow Literary Society, 2/I/13; cf. this Essay, Part I, Chap. 1, note 1, and Part II, Chap. 1, note 1.

A way of speaking so universal among men, common to the learned and the unlearned in all nations, and in all languages, must have a meaning. To suppose it to be words without meaning, is to treat, with undue contempt, the common sense of mankind.

Supposing this phrase to have a meaning, we may consider in what way reason may serve to regulate human conduct, so that some actions of men are to be denominated reasonable, and others unreasonable.

I take it for granted, that there can be no exercise of reason without judgment, nor, on the other hand, any judgment of things, abstract and general, without some degree of reason.

‹207› If, therefore, there be any principles of action in the human constitution, which, in their nature, necessarily imply such judgment, they are the principles which we may call rational, to distinguish them from animal principles, which imply desire and will, but not judgment.

Every deliberate human action must be done either as the means, or as an end; as the means to some end, to which it is subservient, or as an end, for its own sake, and without regard to any thing beyond it.

That it is a part of the office of reason to determine, what are the proper means to any end which we desire, no man ever denied. But some Philosophers, particularly Mr HUME, think that it is no part of the office of reason to determine the ends we ought to pursue, or the preference due to one end above another. This, he thinks, is not the office of reason, but of taste or feeling.[69]

If this be so, reason cannot, with any propriety, be called a principle of action. Its office can only be to minister to the principles of action, by discovering the means of their gratification. Accordingly Mr HUME maintains, that reason is no principle of action; but that it is, and ought to be, the servant of the passions.

I shall endeavour to shew, that, among the various ends of human actions, there are some, of which, without reason, we could not even form a conception; and that, as soon as they are conceived, a regard to them is, by our constitution, not only a principle of action, but a leading and governing principle, to which all our animal principles are subordinate, and to which they ought to be subject.

These I shall call *rational* principles; because they can exist‹208› only in beings endowed with reason, and because, to act from these principles, is what has always been meant by acting according to reason.

69. See *Treatise*, 2.3.3 (‘Of the influencing motives of the will’).

The ends of human actions I have in view, are two, to wit, What is good for us upon the whole, and what appears to be our duty. They are very strictly connected, lead to the same course of conduct, and co-operate with each other; and, on that account, have commonly been comprehended under one name, that of *reason.* But as they may be disjoined, and are really distinct principles of action, I shall consider them separately.

CHAP. II.

Of Regard to our Good on the Whole.[70]

IT will not be denied that man, when he comes to years of understanding, is led by his rational nature, to form the conception of what is good for him upon the whole.

How early in life this general notion of good enters into the mind, I cannot pretend to determine. It is one of the most general and abstract notions we form.

Whatever makes a man more happy, or more perfect, is good, and is an object of desire as soon as we are capable of forming the conception of it. The contrary is ill, and is an object of aversion.

In the first part of life we have many enjoyments of various kinds; but very similar to those of brute-animals.

They consist in the exercise of our senses and powers of mo‹209›tion, the gratification of our appetites, and the exertions of our kind affections. These are chequered with many evils of pain, and fear, and disappointment, and sympathy with the sufferings of others.

But the goods and evils of this period of life are of short duration, and soon forgot. The mind being regardless of the past, and unconcerned about the future, we have then no other measure of good but the present desire; no other measure of evil but the present aversion.

Every animal desire has some particular and present object, and looks not beyond that object to its consequences, or to the connections it may have with other things.

The present object, which is most attractive, or excites the strongest desire, determines the choice, whatever be its consequences. The present evil that presses most, is avoided, though it should be the road to a greater

70. See note 68, p. 152.

good to come, or the only way to escape a greater evil. This is the way in which brutes act, and the way in which men must act, till they come to the use of reason.

As we grow up to understanding, we extend our view both forward and backward. We reflect upon what is past, and, by the lamp of experience, discern what will probably happen in time to come. We find that many things which we eagerly desired, were too dearly purchased, and that things grievous for the present, like nauseous medicines, may be salutary in the issue.

We learn to observe the connections of things, and the consequences of our actions; and, taking an extended view of our existence, past, present, and future, we correct our first notions of good and ill, and form the conception of what is good or ill upon the whole; which must be estimated, not from the present ‹210› feeling, or from the present animal desire or aversion, but from a due consideration of its consequences, certain or probable, during the whole of our existence.

That which, taken with all its discoverable connections and con - sequences, brings more good than ill, I call *good upon the whole*.

That brute-animals have any conception of this good, I see no reason to believe. And it is evident, that man cannot have the conception of it, till reason is so far advanced, that he can seriously reflect upon the past, and take a prospect of the future part of his existence.

It appears therefore, that the very conception of what is good or ill for us upon the whole, is the offspring of reason, and can be only in beings endowed with reason. And if this conception give rise to any principle of action in man, which he had not before, that principle may very properly be called a rational principle of action.

I pretend not in this to say any thing that is new, but what reason suggested to those who first turned their attention to the philosophy of morals. I beg leave to quote one passage from C ICERO, in his first book of *Offices*; wherein, with his usual elegance, he expresses the substance of what I have said. And there is good reason to think that C ICERO borrowed it from P ANÆTIUS, a Greek Philosopher, whose books of Offices are lost.

‘Sed inter hominem et belluam hoc maxime interest, quod hæc tantum quantum sensu movetur, ad id solum quod adest, quodque præsens est se accommodat, paululum admodum sentiens præteritum aut futurum: Homo autem quoniam rationis est particeps, per quam consequentia cernit, causas rerum videt, earumque prægressus et quasi antecessiones

non ignorat; similitudines comparat, et rebus præsentibus adjungit atque an‹211›nectit futuras; facile totius vitæ cursum videt ad eamque degendam preparat res necessarias.'[71]

I observe, in the *next* place, That as soon as we have the conception of what is good or ill for us upon the whole, we are led, by our constitution, to seek the good and avoid the ill; and this becomes not only a principle of action, but a leading or governing principle, to which all our animal principles ought to be subordinate.

I am very apt to think, with Dr P RICE, that, in intelligent beings, the desire of what is good, and aversion to what is ill, is necessarily connected with the intelligent nature; and that it is a contradiction to suppose such a being to have the notion of good without the desire of it, or the notion of ill without aversion to it. [72] Perhaps there may be other necessary connections between understanding and the best principles of action, which our faculties are too weak to discern. That they are necessarily connected in him who is perfect in understanding, we have good reason to believe.

To prefer a greater good, though distant, to a less that is present; to chuse a present evil, in order to avoid a greater evil, or to obtain a greater good, is, in the judgment of all men, wise and reasonable conduct; and, when a man acts the contrary part, all men will acknowledge, that he acts foolishly and unreasonably. Nor will it be denied, that, in innumerable cases in common life, our animal principles draw us one way, while a regard to what is good on the whole, draws us the contrary way. Thus the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these two are contrary. [73] That in every conflict of this kind the rational principle ought to prevail, and the animal to be subordinate, is too evident to need, or to admit of proof.

71. Transl. 'But the most marked difference between man and beast is this: the beast, just as far as it is moved by the senses and with very little perception of past or future, adapts itself to that alone which is present at the moment; while the man – because he is endowed with reason, by which he comprehends the chain of consequences, perceives the causes of things, understands the relation of cause to effect and of effect to cause, draws analogies, and connects and associates the present and the future – easily surveys the course of his whole life and makes the necessary preparations for its conduct': *De officiis*, I.iv (11): p. 13.
72. See Richard Price, *Review of Morals*, p. 45: 'Can those natures of things, from which the *desire* of happiness and *aversion* to misery necessarily arise, leave, at the same time, a rational nature totally indifferent as any *approbation* of actions procuring the one, or preventing the other?'
73. Cf. p. 138, note 53 above.

Thus, I think, it appears, that to pursue what is good up ‹212› on the whole, and to avoid what is ill upon the whole, is a rational principle of action, grounded upon our constitution as reasonable creatures.

It appears that it is not without just cause, that this principle of action has in all ages been called *reason*, in opposition to our animal principles, which in common language are called by the general name of the *passions.*

The first not only operates in a calm and cool manner, like reason, but implies real judgment in all its operations. The second, to wit, the passions, are blind desires of some particular object, without any judgment or consideration, whether it be good for us upon the whole, or ill.

It appears also, that the fundamental maxim of prudence, and of all good morals, That the passions ought, in all cases, to be under the dominion of reason, is not only self-evident, when rightly understood, but is expressed according to the common use and propriety of language.

The contrary maxim maintained by Mr HUME, can only be defended by a gross and palpable abuse of words. For, in order to defend it, he must include under the *passions*, that very principle which has always, in all languages, been called *reason*, and never was, in any language, called a *passion*. And from the meaning of the word *reason* he must exclude the most important part of it, by which we are able to discern and to pursue what appears to be good upon the whole. And thus, including the most important part of reason under passion, and making the least important part of reason to be the whole, he defends his favourite paradox, That reason is, and ought to be, the servant of the passions.[74]

To judge of what is true or false in speculative points, is the ‹213› office of speculative reason; and to judge of what is good or ill for us upon the whole, is the office of practical reason. Of true and false there are no degrees; but of good and ill there are many degrees, and many kinds; and men are very apt to form erroneous opinions concerning them; misled by their passions, by the authority of the multitude, and by other causes.

Wise men, in all ages, have reckoned it a chief point of wisdom, to make a right estimate of the goods and evils of life. They have laboured to discover the errors of the multitude on this important point, and to warn others against them.

The ancient moralists, though divided into sects, all agreed in this, That opinion has a mighty influence upon what we commonly account the

74. See *Treatise*, 2.3.3.

goods and ills of life, to alleviate or to aggravate them.

The Stoics carried this so far, as to conclude that they all depend on opinion. *Πάντα Ὑπόληψις*[75] was a favourite maxim with them.

We see, indeed, that the same station or condition of life, which makes one man happy, makes another miserable, and to a third is perfectly indifferent. We see men miserable through life, from vain fears, and anxious desires, grounded solely upon wrong opinions. We see men wear themselves out with toilsome days, and sleepless nights, in pursuit of some object which they never attain; or which, when attained, gives little satisfaction, perhaps real disgust.

The evils of life, which every man must feel, have a very different effect upon different men. What sinks one into despair and absolute misery, rouses the virtue and magnanimity of another, who bears it as the lot of humanity, and as the discipline ‹214› of a wise and merciful father in heaven. He rises superior to adversity, and is made wiser and better by it, and consequently happier.

It is therefore of the last importance, in the conduct of life, to have just opinions with respect to good and evil; and surely it is the province of reason to correct wrong opinions, and to lead us into those that are just and true.

It is true indeed, that men's passions and appetites, too often draw them to act contrary to their cool judgment and opinion of what is best for them. *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor* ,[76] is the case in every wilful deviation from our true interest and our duty.

When this is the case, the man is self-condemned, he sees that he acted the part of a brute, when he ought to have acted the part of a man. He is convinced that reason ought to have restrained his passion, and not to have given the rein to it.

When he feels the bad effects of his conduct, he imputes them to himself, and would be stung with remorse for his folly, though he had no account to make to a superior being. He has sinned against himself, and brought upon his own head the punishment which his folly deserved.

From this we may see, that this rational principle of a regard to our good upon the whole, gives us the conception of a *right* and a *wrong*

75. Transl. 'Everything depends upon opinion': that is, the goodness or badness of all things (except virtue) is a matter of judgment, which is in our power. This phrase is used as an epigram on the title-page of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*.

76. Transl. 'I see the better and approve it, [but] I follow the worse': Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, ll. 20–1.

in human conduct, at least of a *wise* and a *foolish.* It produces a kind of self-approbation, when the passions and appetites are kept in their due subjection to it; and a kind of remorse and compunction, when it yields to them.

In these respects, this principle is so similar to the moral prin‹215›ciple, or conscience, and so interwoven with it, that both are commonly comprehended under the name of *reason*. This similarity led many of the ancient Philosophers, and some among the moderns, to resolve conscience, or a sense of duty, entirely into a regard to what is good for us upon the whole.[77]

That they are distinct principles of action, though both lead to the same conduct in life, I shall have occasion to shew, when I come to treat of *conscience*.

CHAP. III.

The Tendency of this Principle.[78]

It has been the opinion of the wisest men, in all ages, that this principle, of a regard to our good upon the whole, in a man duly enlightened, leads to the practice of every virtue.[79]

77. Reid is thinking of what he calls 'the selfish systems'. See note 79 below.
78. See note 68, p. 152 above.
79. The principle that virtue is 'our good upon the whole' played a major role in the development of Reid's thought. Mostly he took it in a much narrower sense than he does in this and the preceding chapters, viz. as the principle or system of 'selfishness' or of 'self-love' that he found in Epicurus (as presented in Diogenes Laertius and Cicero, *De finibus* I), Lucretius, 'the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages' (unnamed), Gassendi, John Clarke of Hull and Archibald Campbell. He contrasted this 'system' with other reductive schemes: (1) virtue as 'Disinterested Benevolence' ('ancient', 'adopted by the later platonists and the more sober & judicious ... Mystick Divines' of the 'middle and later Ages', but first articulated in a 'Philosophical Manner by Dr. Hutcheson'); (2) virtue as acting 'Ageeably to Reason or the fittness of things' (Samuel Clark, Wollaston, Balguy, Price) (8/III/3, 11–14; many more names are listed but not clearly categorized). He also identifies systems that 'resolve all Moral Obligation into the Will of God' as 'at bottom the Same with the Selfish System' (7/II/7, 5). Cf. also note 13, p. 99. While clearly least sympathetic to the 'selfish system' in the narrower sense, Reid rejected *all* such schemes as too narrow, and in one place he suggested that his was a 'Middle way' between Epicureans and Stoics (7/V/12, 2). Cf. Essay V, Chap. 1.

This was acknowledged, even by EPICURUS; and the best moralists among the ancients derived all the virtues from this principle. For, among them, the whole of morals was reduced to this question, What is the greatest good? Or what course of conduct is best for us upon the whole?

In order to resolve this question, they divided goods into three classes, the goods of the body; the goods of fortune, or external goods, and the goods of the mind; meaning, by the last, wisdom and virtue.

Comparing these different classes of goods, they shewed, with convincing evidence, that the goods of the mind are, in many respects, superior to those of the body and of fortune, not only as they have more dignity, are more durable, and less exposed ‹216› to the strokes of fortune, but chiefly as they are the only goods in our power, and which depend wholly on our conduct.

EPICURUS himself maintained, that the wise man may be happy in the tranquillity of his mind, even when racked with pain, and struggling with adversity.[80]

They observed very justly, that the goods of fortune, and even those of the body, depend much on opinion; and that, when our opinion of them is duly corrected by reason, we shall find them of small value in themselves.

How can he be happy who places his happiness in things which it is not in his power to attain, or in things from which, when attained, a fit of sickness, or a stroke of fortune, may tear him asunder.

The value we put upon things, and our uneasiness in the want of them, depend upon the strength of our desires; correct the desire, and the uneasiness ceases.

The fear of the evils of body and of fortune, is often a greater evil than the things we fear. As the wise man moderates his desires by temperance, so, to real or imaginary dangers, he opposes the shield of fortitude and magnanimity, which raises him above himself, and makes him happy and triumphant in those moments wherein others are most miserable.

These oracles of reason led the Stoics so far as to maintain, That all desires and fears, with regard to things not in our power, ought to be totally eradicated; that virtue is the only good; that what we call the goods of the body and of fortune, are really things indifferent, which may, according to circumstances, prove good or ill, and therefore have no intrinsic goodness in themselves; that our sole business ought to be, to act ‹217› our part well, and to do what is right, without the least concern

80. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, ‘Epicurus’, X (118).

about things not in our power, which we ought, with perfect acquiescence, to leave to the care of him who governs the world.

This noble and elevated conception of human wisdom and duty was taught by SOCRATES, free from the extravagancies which the Stoics afterwards joined with it. We see it in the Alcibiades of PLATO; from which JUVENAL hath taken it in his tenth satire, and adorned it with the graces of poetry.

Omnibus in terris quæ sunt a gadibus usque
Auroram et Gangen, pauci dignoscere possunt
Vera bona, atque illis multum diversa, remotâ
Erroris nebulâ. Quid enim ratione timemus?
Aut cupimus? Quid tam dextera pede concupis ut te
Conatus non pœniteat, votique peracti?
Nil ergo optabunt homines? Si concilium vis,
Permittes ipsis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris.
Nam pro jucundis aptissima quæque dabunt Dii.
Charior est illis homo quam sibi. Nos animorum
Impulsu, et cæca magnaque cupidine ducti,
Conjugium petimus, partumque uxoris; at illis
Notum qui pueri, qualisque futura sit uxor.
Fortem posce animum, et mortis terrore carentem,
Qui spatium vitæ extremum inter munera ponat
Naturæ; qui ferre queat quoscunque labores,
Nesciat irasci, cupiat nihil, et potiores
HERCULIS ærumnas credat, sævosque labores
Et venere, et cœnis, et plumis, SARDANAPALI.
Monstro quid ipse tibi possis dare. Semita certe
Tranquillæ per virtutem patet unica vitæ.
Nullum numen abest si sit prudentia; sed te
Nos facimus fortuna Deam, cœloque locamus.[81]

81. Transl. 'In all the lands that stretch from Gades to the Ganges and the Morn, there are but few who can distinguish true blessings from their opposites, putting aside the mists of error. For when does Reason direct our desires or our fears? What project do we form so auspiciously that we do not repent us of our effort and of the granted wish? ... Is there nothing then for which men shall pray? If you ask my counsel, you will leave it to the gods themselves to provide what is good for us and what will be serviceable for our state; for, in place of

‹218› Even HORACE, in his serious moments, falls into this system.

> Nil admirari, prope res est una Numici,
> Solaque quæ possit facere et servare beatum.[82]

We cannot but admire the Stoical system of morals, even when we think that, in some points, it went beyond the pitch of human nature. The virtue, the temperance, the fortitude and magnanimity of some who sincerely embraced it, amidst all the flattery of sovereign power and the luxury of a court, will be everlasting monuments to the honour of that system, and to the honour of human nature.

That a due regard to what is best for us upon the whole, in an enlightened mind, leads to the practice of every virtue, may be argued from considering what we think best for those for whom we have the strongest affection, and whose good we tender as our own. In judging for ourselves, our passions and appetites are apt to bias our judgment; but when we judge for others, this bias is removed, and we judge impartially.

What is it then that a wise man would wish as the greatest good to a brother, a son, or a friend?

Is it that he may spend his life in a constant round of the pleasures of sense, and fare sumptuously every day?

No, surely; we wish him to be a man of real virtue and worth. We may wish for him an honourable station in life; but only with this condition, that he acquit himself honourably in it, and acquire just reputation, by being useful to his country and to mankind. We would a thousand times

what is pleasing, they will give us what is best. Man is dearer to them than he is to himself. Impelled by strong and blind desire in our hearts, we ask for wife and offspring; but the gods know of what sort the sons, of what sort the wife, will be. ... Ask for a stout heart that has no fear of death, and deems length of days the least of Nature's gifts; that can endure any kind of toil; that knows neither wrath nor desire, and thinks that the woes and hard labours of Hercules are better than the loves and the banquets and the downy cushions of Sardanapalus. What I commend to you, you can give to yourself; for it is assuredly through virtue that lies the one and only path to a life of peace. Thou wouldst have no divinity, O Fortune, if we had but wisdom; it is we that make a goddess of thee, and place thee in the skies': Juvenal, *Satires* X, ll. 1–6, 346–53, 357–66, pp. 192, 219–21,

82. Transl. '"Marvel at nothing" – that is perhaps the one and only thing, Numicius, that can make a man happy and keep him so': Horace, *Epistles*, I.vi, ll. 1–2, p. 287.

rather wish him honourably to undergo the labours of HERCULES, than to dissolve in pleasure with SARDANAPALUS.[83]

‹219› Such would be the wish of every man of understanding for the friend whom he loves as his own soul. Such things, therefore, he judges to be best for him upon the whole; and if he judges otherwise for himself, it is only because his judgment is perverted by animal passions and desires.

The sum of what has been said in these three chapters amounts to this:

There is a principle of action in men that are adult and of a sound mind, which, in all ages, has been called *reason*, and set in opposition to the animal principles which we call the *passions*. The ultimate object of this principle is what we judge to be good upon the whole. This is not the object of any of our animal principles, they being all directed to particular objects, without any comparison with others, or any consideration of their being good or ill upon the whole.

What is good upon the whole cannot even be conceived without the exercise of reason, and therefore cannot be an object to beings that have not some degree of reason.

As soon as we have the conception of this object, we are led, by our constitution, to desire and pursue it. It justly claims a preference to all objects of pursuit that can come in competition with it. In preferring it to any gratification that opposes it, or in submitting to any pain or mortification which it requires, we act according to reason; and every such action is accompanied with self-approbation and the approbation of mankind. The contrary actions are accompanied with shame and self-condemnation in the agent, and with contempt in the spectator, as foolish and unreasonable.

The right application of this principle to our conduct requires an extensive prospect of human life, and a correct judg‹220›ment and estimate of its goods and evils, with respect to their intrinsic worth and dignity, their constancy and duration, and their attainableness. He must be a wise man indeed, if any such man there be, who can perceive, in every instance, or even in every important instance, what is best for him upon the whole, if he have no other rule to direct his conduct.

However, according to the best judgment which wise men have been able to form, this principle leads to the practice of every virtue. It leads directly to the virtues of prudence, temperance and fortitude. And, when

83. For Sardanapalus, see p. 103 above, note 15.

we consider ourselves as social creatures, whose happiness or misery is very much connected with that of our fellow-men; when we consider, that there are many benevolent affections planted in our constitution, whose exertions make a capital part of our good and enjoyment; from these considerations, this principle leads us also, though more indirectly, to the practice of justice, humanity, and all the social virtues.

It is true, that a regard to our own good cannot, of itself, produce any benevolent affection. But, if such affections be a part of our constitution, and if the exercise of them make a capital part of our happiness, a regard to our own good ought to lead us to cultivate and exercise them, as every benevolent affection makes the good of others to be our own.

‹221›

CHAP. IV.

Defects of this Principle.[84]

HAVING explained the nature of this principle of action, and shewn in general the tenor of conduct to which it leads, I shall conclude what relates to it, by pointing out some of its defects, if it be supposed, as it has been by some Philosophers, to be the only regulating principle of human conduct.

Upon that supposition, it would neither be a sufficiently plain rule of conduct, nor would it raise the human character to that degree of perfection of which it is capable, nor would it yield so much real happiness as when it is joined with another rational principle of action, to wit, a disinterested regard to duty.

First, I apprehend the greater part of mankind can never attain such extensive views of human life, and so correct a judgment of good and ill, as the right application of this principle requires.

The authority of the poet before quoted is of weight in this point. ‘Pauci dignoscere possunt vera bona, remotâ erroris nebulâ.’ [85] The ignorance of the bulk of mankind concurs with the strength of their passions to lead them into error in this most important point.

Every man, in his calm moments, wishes to know what is best for him on the whole, and to do it. But the difficulty of discovering it clearly,

84. See Chap. 1, note 1, p. 152 above. See also 7/IV/2.

85. Transl. ‘There are but few who can distinguish true blessings from their opposites, putting aside the mists of error’: Juvenal, *Satires*, X, ll. 2–4, p. 193.

amidst such variety of opinions and the importunity of present desires, tempt men to give over the search, and to yield to the present inclination.

‹222› Though Philosophers and moralists have taken much laudable pains to correct the errors of mankind in this great point, their instructions are known to few; they have little influence upon the greater part of those to whom they are known, and sometimes little even upon the Philosopher himself.

Speculative discoveries gradually spread from the knowing to the ignorant, and diffuse themselves over all, so that, with regard to them, the world, it may be hoped, will still be growing wiser. But the errors of men, with regard to what is truly good or ill, after being discovered and refuted in every age, are still prevalent.

Men stand in need of a sharper monitor to their duty than a dubious view of distant good. There is reason to believe, that a present sense of duty has, in many cases, a stronger influence than the apprehension of distant good would have of itself. And it cannot be doubted, that a sense of guilt and demerit is a more pungent reprover than the bare apprehension of having mistaken our true interest.

The brave soldier, in exposing himself to danger and death, is animated, not by a cold computation of the good and the ill, but by a noble and elevated sense of military duty.

A Philosopher shews, by a copious and just induction, what is our real good and what our ill. But this kind of reasoning is not easily apprehended by the bulk of men. It has too little force upon their minds to resist the sophistry of the passions. They are apt to think, that if such rules be good in the general, they may admit of particular exceptions, and that what is good for the greater part, may, to some persons, on account of particular circumstances, be ill.

Thus, I apprehend, that, if we had no plainer rule to direct ‹223› our conduct in life than a regard to our greatest good, the greatest part of mankind would be fatally misled, even by ignorance of the road to it.

Secondly, Though a steady pursuit of our own real good may, in an enlightened mind, produce a kind of virtue which is entitled to some degree of approbation, yet it can never produce the noblest kind of virtue, which claims our highest love and esteem.

We account him a wise man who is wise for himself; and, if he prosecutes this end through difficulties and temptations that lie in his way, his character is far superior to that of the man who, having the same end in view, is continually starting out of the road to it, from an attach-

ment to his appetites and passions, and doing every day what he knows he shall heartily repent.

Yet, after all, this wise man, whose thoughts and cares are all centered ultimately in himself, who indulges even his social affections only with a view to his own good, is not the man whom we cordially love and esteem.

Like a cunning merchant, he carries his goods to the best market, and watches every opportunity of putting them off to the best account. He does well and wisely. But it is for himself. We owe him nothing upon this account. Even when he does good to others, he means only to serve himself; and therefore has no just claim to their gratitude or affection.

This surely, if it be virtue, is not the noblest kind, but a low and mercenary species of it. It can neither give a novel evaluation to the mind that possesses it, nor attract the esteem and love of others.

Our cordial love and esteem is due only to the man whose ‹224› soul is not contracted within itself, but embraces a more extensive object: who loves virtue, not for her dowry only, but for her own sake: whose benevolence is not selfish, but generous and disinterested: who, forgetful of himself, has the common good at heart, not as the means only, but as the end: who abhors what is base, though he were to be a gainer by it, and loves that which is right, although he should suffer by it.

Such a man we esteem the perfect man, compared with whom, he who has no other aim but good to himself, is a mean and despicable character.

Disinterested goodness and rectitude, is the glory of the Divine Nature, without which he might be an object of fear or hope, but not of true devotion. And it is the image of this divine attribute in the human character, that is the glory of man.

To serve GOD and be useful to mankind, without any concern about our own good and happiness, is, I believe, beyond the pitch of human nature. But to serve GOD and be useful to men, merely to obtain good to ourselves, or to avoid ill, is servility, and not that liberal service which true devotion and real virtue require.

Thirdly, Though one might be apt to think, that he has the best chance for happiness, who has no other end of his deliberate actions but his own good; yet a little consideration may satisfy us of the contrary.[86]

A concern for our own good is not a principle that, of itself, gives any enjoyment. On the contrary, it is apt to fill the mind with fear, and care,

86. In 7/V/12, 3, Reid gives a reference for this argument: ‘see Butler Serm.’; i.e., Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, Sermon 11, ‘Upon the love of our neighbour’.

and anxiety. And these concomitants of this principle, often give pain and uneasiness, that overbalance the good they have in view.

‹225› We may here compare, in point of present happiness, two imaginary characters; the first, of the man who has no other ultimate end of his deliberate actions but his own good; and who has no regard to virtue or duty, but as the means to that end. The second character is that of the man who is not indifferent with regard to his own good, but has another ultimate end perfectly consistent with it, to wit, a disinterested love of virtue, for its own sake, or a regard to duty as an end.

Comparing these two characters in point of happiness, that we may give all possible advantage to the selfish principle, we shall suppose the man who is actuated solely by it, to be so far enlightened as to see it his interest to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world, and that he follows the same course of conduct from the motive of his own good only, which the other does, in a great measure, or in some measure, from a sense of duty and rectitude.

We put the case so as that the difference between these two persons may be, not in what they do, but in the motive from which they do it: and, I think, there can be no doubt that he who acts from the noblest and most generous motive, will have most happiness in his conduct.

The one labours only for hire, without any love to the work. The other loves the work, and thinks it the noblest and most honourable he can be employed in. To the first, the mortification and self-denial which the course of virtue requires, is a grievous task, which he submits to only through necessity. To the other it is victory and triumph, in the most honourable warfare.

It ought farther to be considered, That although wise men have concluded that virtue is the only road to happiness, this‹226› conclusion is founded chiefly upon the natural respect men have for virtue, and the good or happiness that is intrinsic to it and arises from the love of it. If we suppose a man, as we now do, altogether destitute of this principle, who considered virtue only as the means to another end, there is no reason to think he would ever take it to be the road to happiness, but would wander for ever seeking this object, where it is not to be found.

The road of duty is so plain, that the man who seeks it, with an upright heart, cannot greatly err from it. But the road to happiness, if that be supposed the only end our nature leads us to pursue, would be found dark and intricate, full of snares and dangers, and therefore not to be trodden without fear, and care, and perplexity.

The happy man therefore, is not he whose happiness is his only care, but he who, with perfect resignation, leaves the care of his happiness to him who made him, while he pursues with ardor the road of his duty.

This gives an elevation to his mind, which is real happiness. Instead of care, and fear, and anxiety, and disappointment, it brings joy and triumph. It gives a relish to every good we enjoy, and brings good out of evil.

And as no man can be indifferent about his happiness, the good man has the consolation to know, that he consults his happiness most effectually, when, without any painful anxiety about future events, he does his duty.

Thus, I think, it appears, That although a regard to our good upon the whole, be a rational principle in man, yet, if it be supposed the only regulating principle of our conduct, it would be a more uncertain rule, it would give far less perfection to the ‹227› human character, and far less happiness, than when joined with another rational principle, to wit, a regard to duty.

CHAP. V.

Of the Notion of Duty, Rectitude, moral Obligation.

A BEING endowed with the animal principles of action only, may be capable of being trained to certain purposes by discipline, as we see many brute-animals are, but would be altogether incapable of being governed by law.

The subject of law must have the conception of a general rule of conduct, which, without some degree of reason, he cannot have. He must likewise have a sufficient inducement to obey the law, even when his strongest animal desires draw him the contrary way.

This inducement may be a sense of interest, or a sense of duty, or both concurring.

These are the only principles I am able to conceive, which can reasonably induce a man to regulate all his actions according to a certain general rule or law. They may therefore be justly called the*rational* principles of action, since they can have no place but in a being endowed with reason, and since it is by them only, that man is capable either of political or of moral government.

Without them human life would be like a ship at sea without hands, left to be carried by winds and tides as they happen. It belongs to the rational

part of our nature to intend a certain port, as the end of the voyage of life; to take the advantage of ‹228› winds and tides when they are favourable, and to bear up against them when they are unfavourable.

A sense of interest may induce us to do this, when a suitable reward is set before us. But there is a nobler principle in the constitution of man, which, in many cases, gives a clearer and more certain rule of conduct, than a regard merely to interest would give, and a principle, without which man would not be a moral agent.

A man is prudent when he consults his real interest, but he cannot be virtuous, if he has no regard to duty.

I proceed now to consider this regard to duty as a rational principle of action in man, and as that principle alone by which he is capable either of virtue or vice.

I shall first offer some observations with regard to the general notion of duty, and its contrary, or of right and wrong in human conduct, and then consider how we come to judge and determine certain things in human conduct to be right, and others to be wrong.

With regard to the notion or conception of duty, I take it to be too simple to admit of a logical definition.

We can define it only by synonymous words or phrases, or by its properties and necessary concomitants, as when we say that it is what we ought to do, what is fair and honest, what is approvable, what every man professes to be the rule of his conduct, what all men praise, and what is in itself laudable, though no man should praise it.

I observe, in the *next* place, That the notion of duty cannot ‹229› be resolved into that of interest, or what is most for our happiness.

Every man may be satisfied of this who attends to his own conceptions, and the language of all mankind shews it. When I say, this is my interest, I mean one thing; when I say, it is my duty, I mean another thing. And though the same course of action, when rightly understood, may be both my duty and my interest, the conceptions are very different. Both are reasonable motives to action, but quite distinct in their nature.

I presume it will be granted, that in every man of real worth, there is a principle of honour, a regard to what is honourable or dishonourable, very distinct from a regard to his interest. It is folly in a man to disregard his interest, but to do what is dishonourable is baseness. The first may move our pity, or, in some cases, our contempt, but the last provokes our indignation.

As these two principles are different in their nature, and not resolvable

into one, so the principle of honour is evidently superior in dignity to that of interest.

No man would allow him to be a man of honour, who should plead his interest to justify what he acknowledged to be dishonourable; but to sacrifice interest to honour never costs a blush.

It likewise will be allowed by every man of honour, that this principle is not to be resolved into a regard to our reputation among men, otherwise the man of honour would not deserve to be trusted in the dark. He would have no aversion to lie, or cheat, or play the coward, when he had no dread of being discovered.

I take it for granted, therefore, that every man of real honour ‹230› feels an abhorrence of certain actions, because they are in themselves base, and feels an obligation to certain other actions, because they are in themselves what honour requires, and this, independently of any consideration of interest or reputation.

This is an immediate moral obligation. This principle of honour, which is acknowledged by all men who pretend to character, is only another name for what we call a regard to duty, to rectitude, to propriety of conduct. It is a moral obligation which obliges a man to do certain things because they are right, and not to do other things because they are wrong.

Ask the man of honour, why he thinks himself obliged to pay a debt of honour? The very question shocks him. To suppose that he needs any other inducement to do it but the principle of honour, is to suppose that he has no honour, no worth, and deserves no esteem.

There is therefore a principle in man, which, when he acts according to it, gives him a consciousness of worth, and when he acts contrary to it, a sense of demerit.

From the varieties of education, of fashion, of prejudices, and of habits, men may differ much in opinion with regard to the extent of this principle, and of what it commands and forbids; but the notion of it, as far as it is carried, is the same in all. It is that which gives a man real worth, and is the object of moral approbation.

Men of rank call it *honour*, and too often confine it to certain virtues that are thought most essential to their rank. The vulgar call it *honesty, probity, virtue, conscience*. Philosophers have given it the names of *the moral sense, the moral faculty, rectitude.*

The universality of this principle in men that are grown up ‹231› to years of understanding and reflection, is evident. The words that express it, the names of the virtues which it commands, and of the vices which it

forbids, the *ought* and *ought not* which express its dictates, make an essential part of every language. The natural affections of respect to worthy characters, of resentment of injuries, of gratitude for favours, of indignation against the worthless, are parts of the human constitution which suppose a right and a wrong in conduct. Many transactions that are found necessary in the rudest societies go upon the same supposition. In all testimony, in all promises, and in all contracts, there is necessarily implied a moral obligation on one party, and a trust in the other, grounded upon this obligation.

The variety of opinions among men in points of morality, is not greater, but, as I apprehend, much less than in speculative points; and this variety is as easily accounted for, from the common causes of error, in the one case as in the other; so that it is not more evident, that there is a real distinction between true and false, in matters of speculation, than that there is a real distinction between right and wrong in human conduct.

Mr HUME'S authority, if there were any need of it, is of weight in this matter, because he was not wont to go rashly into vulgar opinions.

'Those,' says he, 'who have denied the reality of moral distinctions, may be ranked among the disingenuous disputants (who really do not believe the opinions they defend but engage in the controversy, from affectation, from a spirit of opposition, or from a desire of shewing wit and ingenuity superior to the rest of mankind); nor is it conceivable, that any human creature could ever seriously believe, that all characters and actions were alike entitled to the regard and affection of every one.

'Let a man's insensibility be ever so great, he must often be ‹232› touched with the images of right and wrong; and let his prejudices be ever so obstinate, he must observe that others are susceptible of like impressions. The only way, therefore, of convincing an antagonist of this kind is to leave him to himself. For, finding that nobody keeps up the controversy with him, it is probable he will at last, of himself, from mere weariness, come over to the side of common sense and reason.'[87]

What we call *right* and *honourable* in human conduct, was, by the ancients, called *honestum*, *τὸ καλὸν*; of which TULLY says, 'Quod vere dicimus, etiamsi a nullo laudetur, natura esse laudabile.'[88]

87. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* 1.2: SBN 169–70. Reid interpolates into this quotation a passage from the previous paragraph of the *Enquiry*, and changes Hume's 'converting' to 'convincing'.
88. Transl. 'What we correctly maintain merits praise, even though it be praised by no one': *De officiis* I.iv (14), p. 17.

All the ancient sects, except the Epicureans, distinguished the *honestum* from the *utile*, as we distinguish what is a man's duty from what is his interest.

The word *officium*, *καθῆκον*, extended both to the *honestum* and the *utile*: So that every reasonable action, proceeding either from a sense of duty or a sense of interest, was called *officium*. It is defined by CICERO to be, 'Id quod cur factum sit ratio probabilis reddi potest.'[89] We commonly render it by the word *duty*, but it is more extensive; for the word *duty*, in the English language, I think, is commonly applied only to what the ancients called *honestum*. CICERO, and PANÆTIUS before him, treating of offices, first point out those that are grounded upon the *honestum*, and next those that are grounded upon the *utile*.[90]

The most ancient philosophical system concerning the principles of action in the human mind, and, I think, the most agreeable to nature, is that which we find in some fragments of the ancient Pythagoreans, and which is adopted by PLATO, and explained in some of his dialogues.[91]

According to this system, there is a leading principle in the ‹233› soul, which like the supreme power in a commonwealth, has authority and right to govern. This leading principle they called *reason*. It is that which distinguishes men that are adult from brutes, idiots and infants. The inferior principles, which are under the authority of the leading principle, are our passions and appetites, which we have in common with the brutes.

CICERO adopts this system, and expresses it well in few words: 'Duplex enim est vis animorum atque naturæ. Una pars in appetitu posita est, quæ hominem huc et illuc rapit, quæ est *ὁρμὴ* græce, altera in ratione, quæ docet, et explanat quid faciendum fugiendumve sit. Ita sit ut ratio præsit appetitus obtemperet.'[92]

This division of our active principles can hardly indeed be accounted a discovery of philosophy, because it has been common to the unlearned

89. Transl. 'That for the performance of which an adequate reason may be rendered': *De officiis* I.iii (8), p. 11.
90. See *De officiis*, Books I and II.
91. It was common in the eighteenth century to see Plato as a disciple of Pythagoras. Reid very rarely mentions specific Platonic dialogues, but in the present context presumably he thinks first of all of the *Republic*'s analogy between the soul and the political society.
92. Transl. 'Now we find that the essential activity of the spirit is twofold: one force is appetite (that is, *ὁρμη* in Greek), which impels a man this way and that; the other is reason, which teaches and explains what should be done and what should be left undone. The result is that reason commands, appetite obeys': *De officiis* I.xxviii (101), p. 103.

in all ages of the world, and seems to be dictated by the common sense of mankind.

What I would now observe concerning this common division of our active powers, is, that the leading principle, which is called *reason*, comprehends both a regard to what is right and honourable, and a regard to our happiness upon the whole.

Although these be really two distinct principles of action, it is very natural to comprehend them under one name, because both are leading principles, both suppose the use of reason, and, when rightly understood, both lead to the same course of life. They are like two fountains whose streams unite and run in the same channel.

When a man, on one occasion, consults his real happiness in things not inconsistent with his duty, though in opposition to the solicitation of appetite or passion; and when, on another occasion, without any selfish consideration, he does what is right ‹234› and honourable, because it is so; in both these cases, he acts reasonably; every man approves of his conduct, and calls it reasonable, or according to reason.

So that, when we speak of reason as a principle of action in man, it includes a regard both to the *honestum* and to the *utile*. Both are combined under one name; and accordingly the dictates of both, in the Latin tongue, were combined under the name *officium*, and in the Greek under *καθῆκον*.

If we examine the abstract notion of duty, or moral obligation, it appears to be neither any real quality of the action considered by itself, nor of the agent considered without respect to the action, but a certain relation between the one and the other.

When we say a man ought to do such a thing, the *ought*, which expresses the moral obligation, has a respect, on the one hand, to the person who ought, and, on the other, to the action which he ought to do. Those two correlates are essential to every moral obligation; take away either, and it has no existence. So that, if we seek the place of moral obligation among the categories, it belongs to the category of *relation*.

There are many relations of things, of which we have the most distinct conception, without being able to define them logically. Equality and proportion are relations between quantities, which every man understands, but no man can define.

Moral obligation is a relation of its own kind, which every man understands, but is perhaps too simple to admit of logical definition. Like all other relations, it may be changed or annihilated by a change in any of the two related things, I mean the agent or the action.

‹235› Perhaps it may not be improper to point out briefly the circumstances, both in the action and in the agent, which are necessary to constitute moral obligation. The universal agreement of men in these, shews that they have one and the same notion of it.

With regard to the action, it must be a voluntary action, or prestation of the person obliged, and not of another. There can be no moral obligation upon a man to be six feet high. Nor can I be under a moral obligation that another person should do such a thing. His actions must be imputed to himself, and mine only to me, either for praise or blame.

I need hardly mention, that a person can be under a moral obligation, only to things within the sphere of his natural power.

As to the party obliged, it is evident, there can be no moral obligation upon an inanimate thing. To speak of moral obligation upon a stone or a tree is ridiculous, because it contradicts every man's notion of moral obligation.

The person obliged must have understanding and will, and some degree of active power. He must not only have the natural faculty of understanding, but the means of knowing his obligation. An invincible ignorance of this destroys all moral obligation.

The opinion of the agent in doing the action gives it its moral denomination. If he does a materially good action, without any belief of its being good, but from some other principle, it is no good action in him. And if he does it with the belief of its being ill, it is ill in him.

Thus, if a man should give to his neighbour a potion which ‹236› he really believes will poison him, but which, in the event, proves salutary, and does much good; in moral estimation, he is a poisoner, and not a benefactor.

These qualifications of the action and of the agent, in moral obligation, are self-evident; and the agreement of all men in them shows, that all men have the same notion and a distinct notion of moral obligation.

CHAP. VI.

Of the Sense of Duty.

We are next to consider, how we learn to judge and determine, that this is right, and that is wrong.

The abstract notion of moral good and ill would be of no use to direct our life, if we had not the power of applying it to particular actions, and

determining what is morally good, and what is morally ill.

Some Philosophers, with whom I agree, ascribe this to an original power or faculty in man, which they call the *moral sense*, the *moral faculty, conscience.*[93] Others think, that our moral sentiments may be accounted for without supposing any original sense or faculty appropriated to that purpose, and go into very different systems to account for them.[94]

I am not, at present, to take any notice of those systems, because the opinion first mentioned seems to me to be the truth, to wit, That, by an original power of the mind, when we come to years of understanding and reflection, we not only have the ‹237› notions of right and wrong in conduct, but perceive certain things to be right, and others to be wrong.

The name of the *moral sense*, though more frequently given to conscience since Lord SHAFTESBURY and Dr HUTCHESON wrote, is not new. The *sensus recti et honesti*[95] is a phrase not unfrequent among the ancients, neither is the *sense of duty* among us.

It has got this name of *sense*, no doubt, from some analogy which it is conceived to bear to the external senses. And if we have just notions of the office of the external senses, the analogy is very evident, and I see no reason to take offence, as some have done, at the name of the *moral sense.*[96]

The offence taken at this name seems to be owing to this, That Philosophers have degraded the senses too much, and deprived them of the most important part of their office.

We are taught, that, by the senses, we have only certain ideas which we could not have otherwise. They are represented as powers by which we have sensations and ideas, not as powers by which we judge.

This notion of the senses I take to be very lame, and to contradict what nature and accurate reflection teach concerning them.

93. Reid probably has in mind Shaftesbury, Butler and Hutcheson.
94. Reid probably has in mind Hume and Smith, who derived the moral faculty from sympathy, and also the English associationists John Gay and David Hartley, who derived the moral faculty from self-love; cf. note 1 to Essay III, Part II, Chap. 2.
95. Transl. ‘The sense of right and duty.’
96. Reid means the criticism by a group of thinkers now referred to as ‘ethical rationalists’; for him they included John Balguy, Samuel Clarke, Richard Hooker, Richard Price and William Wollaston; see 4/I/21, 1; 7/V/1, 27; and, for Reid’s criticism of them, 8/III/10. See also Chap. 7 in Essay V, with note 22. He sketched the dispute to his students in 1765 as one between Hutcheson, and Balguy and Price. See also Richard Price, *Review*, Chap. 1, Section 1.

A man who has totally lost the sense of seeing, may retain very distinct notions of the various colours; but he cannot judge of colours, because he has lost the sense by which alone he could judge. By my eyes I not only have the ideas of a square and a circle, but I perceive this surface to be a square, that to be a circle.

By my ear, I not only have the idea of sounds, loud and soft, acute and grave, but I immediately perceive and judge this sound ‹238› to be loud, that to be soft, this to be acute, that to be grave. Two or more synchronous sounds I perceive to be concordant, others to be discordant.

These are judgments of the senses. They have always been called and accounted such, by those whose minds are not tinctured by philosophical theories. They are the immediate testimony of nature by our senses; and we are so constituted by nature, that we must receive their testimony, for no other reason but because it is given by our senses.

In vain do Sceptics endeavour to overturn this evidence by meta - physical reasoning. Though we should not be able to answer their arguments, we believe our senses still, and rest our most important concerns upon their testimony.[97]

If this be a just notion of our external senses, as I conceive it is, our moral faculty may, I think, without impropriety, be called the *moral sense.*

In its dignity it is, without doubt, far superior to every other power of the mind; but there is this analogy between it and the external senses, That, as by them we have not only the original conceptions of the various qualities of bodies, but the original judgments that this body has such a quality, that such another; so by our moral faculty, we have both the original conceptions of right and wrong in conduct, of merit and demerit, and the original judgments that this conduct is right, that is wrong; that this character has worth, that, demerit.

The testimony of our moral faculty, like that of the external senses, is the testimony of nature, and we have the same reason to rely upon it.

The truths immediately testified by the external senses are the ‹239› first principles from which we reason, with regard to the material world, and from which all our knowledge of it is deduced.

The truths immediately testified by our moral faculty, are the first

97. Here and in the preceding paragraphs Reid summarizes the view of sense per - ception expounded in his *Inquiry*; see also *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* , Essay 1.

principles of all moral reasoning, from which all our knowledge of our duty must be deduced.

By moral reasoning, I understand all reasoning that is brought to prove that such conduct is right, and deserving of moral approbation, or that it is wrong, or that it is indifferent, and, in itself, neither morally good nor ill.

I think, all we can properly call moral judgments are reducible to one or other of these, as all human actions, considered in a moral view, are either good, or bad, or indifferent.

I know the term *moral reasoning* is often used by good writers in a more extensive sense; [98] but as the reasoning I now speak of is of a peculiar kind, distinct from all others, and therefore ought to have a distinct name, I take the liberty to limit the name of *moral reasoning* to this kind.

Let it be understood therefore, that in the reasoning I call *moral*, the conclusion always is, That something in the conduct of moral agents is good or bad, in a greater or a less degree, or indifferent.

All reasoning must be grounded on first principles. This holds in moral reasoning, as in all other kinds. There must therefore be in morals, as in all other sciences, first or self-evident principles, on which all moral reasoning is grounded, and on which it ultimately rests. From such self-evident principles, conclusions may be drawn synthetically with regard to the moral conduct of life; and particular duties or virtues may be traced back to such principles, analytically. But, without such ‹240› principles, we can no more establish any conclusion in morals, than we can build a castle in the air, without any foundation.[99]

An example or two will serve to illustrate this.

It is a first principle in morals, That we ought not to do to another, what we should think wrong to be done to us in like circumstances. If a man is not capable of perceiving this in his cool moments, when he reflects seriously, he is not a moral agent, nor is he capable of being convinced of it by reasoning.

98. In the eighteenth century it was common for the term ‘moral’ to cover a wide range of topics related to the study of human nature. Hence Hume’s subtitle to *A Treatise of Human Nature* : ‘being an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects’. Cp. *Oxford English Dictionary* , ‘Moral’, 3.b: ‘Relating to, affecting, or having influence on a person’s character or conduct, as distinguished from his or her intellectual or physical nature.’

99. Reid develops this line of thought below, Essay V, Chap. 1.

From what topic can you reason with such a man? You may possibly convince him by reasoning, that it is his interest to observe this rule; but this is not to convince him that it is his duty. To reason about justice with a man who sees nothing to be just or unjust; or about benevolence with a man who sees nothing in benevolence preferable to malice, is like reasoning with a blind man about colour, or with a deaf man about sound.

It is a question in morals that admits of reasoning, Whether, by the law of nature, a man ought to have only one wife?

We reason upon this question, by balancing the advantages and disadvantages to the family, and to society in general, that are naturally consequent both upon monogamy and polygamy. And if it can be shewn that the advantages are greatly upon the side of monogamy, we think the point is determined.

But, if a man does not perceive that he ought to regard the good of society, and the good of his wife and children, the reasoning can have no effect upon him, because he denies the first principle upon which it is grounded.

Suppose again, that we reason for monogamy from the intention‹241› of nature, discovered by the proportion of males and of females that are born; a proportion which corresponds perfectly with monogamy, but by no means with polygamy. This argument can have no weight with a man who does not perceive that he ought to have a regard to the intention of nature.

Thus we shall find that all moral reasonings rest upon one or more first principles of morals, whose truth is immediately perceived without reasoning, by all men come to years of understanding.

And this indeed is common to every branch of human knowledge that deserves the name of science. There must be first principles proper to that science, by which the whole superstructure is supported.[100]

The first principles of all the sciences, must be the immediate dictates of our natural faculties; nor is it possible that we should have any other evidence of their truth. And in difference sciences the faculties which dictate their first principles are very different.

Thus, in astronomy and in optics, in which such wonderful discoveries have been made, that the unlearned can hardly believe them to be within

100. For a full account of the role of ‘first principles’ in the structure of knowledge, see *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, Essay VI, Chap. 4, pp. 452–67.

the reach of human capacity, the first principles are phænomena attested solely by that little organ, the human eye. If we disbelieve its report, the whole of those two noble fabrics of science, falls to pieces like the visions of the night.

The principles of music all depend upon the testimony of the ear. The principles of natural philosophy, upon the facts attested by the senses. The principles of mathematics, upon the necessary relations of quantities considered abstractly, such as, That equal quantities added to equal quantities make equal ‹242› sums, and the like; which necessary relations are immediately perceived by the understanding.

The science of politics borrows its principles from what we know by experience of the character and conduct of man. We consider not what he ought to be, but what he is, and thence conclude what part he will act in different situations and circumstances. From such principles we reason concerning the causes and effects of different forms of government, laws, customs, and manners. If man were either a more perfect or a more imperfect, a better or a worse creature than he is, politics would be a different science from what it is.

The first principles of morals are the immediate dictates of the moral faculty. They shew us, not what man is, but what he ought to be. Whatever is immediately perceived to be just, honest, and honourable, in human conduct, carries moral obligation along with it, and the contrary carries demerit and blame; and, from those moral obligations that are immediately perceived, all other moral obligations must be deduced by reasoning.

He that will judge of the colour of an object, must consult his eyes, in a good light, when there is no medium or contiguous objects that may give it a false tinge. But in vain will he consult every other faculty in this matter.

In like manner, he that will judge of the first principles of morals, must consult his conscience, or moral faculty, when he is calm and dispassionate, unbiassed by interest, affection, or fashion.

As we rely upon the clear and distinct testimony of our eyes, concerning the colours and figures of the bodies about us, we have the same reason to rely with security upon the clear and‹243› unbiassed testimony of our conscience, with regard to what we ought and ought not to do. In many cases, moral worth and demerit are discerned no less clearly by the last of those natural faculties, than figure and colour by the first.

The faculties which nature hath given us, are the only engines we can

use to find out the truth. We cannot indeed prove that those faculties are not fallacious, unless GOD should give us new faculties to sit in judgment upon the old. But we are born under a necessity of trusting them.

Every man in his senses believes his eyes, his ears, and his other senses. He believes his consciousness with respect to his own thoughts and purposes, his memory, with regard to what is past, his understanding, with regard to abstract relations of things, and his taste, with regard to what is elegant and beautiful. And he has the same reason, and, indeed, is under the same necessity of believing the clear and unbiassed dictates of his conscience, with regard to what is honourable and what is base.

The sum of what has been said in this chapter is, That, by an original power of the mind, which we call *conscience*, or the *moral faculty*, we have the conceptions of right and wrong in human conduct, of merit and demerit, of duty and moral obligation, and our other moral conceptions; and that, by the same faculty, we perceive some things in human conduct to be right, and others to be wrong; that the first principles of morals are the dictates of this faculty; and that we have the same reason to rely upon those dictates, as upon the determinations of our senses, or of our other natural faculties.

‹244›

CHAP. VII.

Of Moral Approbation and Disapprobation.

OUR moral judgments are not like those we form in speculative matters, dry and unaffecting, but, from their nature, are necessarily accompanied with affections and feelings; which we are now to consider.

It was before observed, that every human action, considered in a moral view, appears to us good, or bad, or indifferent. When we judge the action to be indifferent, neither good nor bad, though this be a moral judgment, it produces no affection nor feeling, any more than our judgments in speculativematters.

But we approve of good actions, and disapprove of bad; and this approbation and disapprobation, when we analyse it, appears to include, not only a moral judgment of the action, but some affection, favourable or unfavourable, towards the agent, and some feeling in ourselves.

Nothing is more evident than this, That moral worth, even in a

stranger, with whom we have not the least connection, never fails to produce some degree of esteem mixed with good will.

The esteem which we have for a man on account of his moral worth, is different from that which is grounded upon his intellectual accomplishments, his birth, fortune, and connection with us.

Moral worth, when it is not set off by eminent abilities, and external advantages, is like a diamond in the mine, which is ‹245› rough and unpolished, and perhaps crusted over with some baser material that takes away its lustre.

But, when it is attended with these advantages, it is like a diamond cut, polished, and set. Then its lustre attracts every eye. Yet these things which add so much to its appearance, add but little to its real value.

We must farther observe, that esteem and benevolent regard, not only accompany real worth by the constitution of our nature, but are perceived to be really and properly due to it; and that, on the contrary, unworthy conduct really merits dislike and indignation.

There is no judgment of the heart of man more clear, or more irresistible, than this, That esteem and regard are really due to good conduct, and the contrary to base and unworthy conduct. Nor can we conceive a greater depravity in the heart of man, than it would be to see and acknowledge worth without feeling any respect to it; or to see and acknowledge the highest worthlessness without any degree of dislike and indignation.

The esteem that is due to worthy conduct, is not lessened when a man is conscious of it in himself. Nor can he help having some esteem for himself, when he is conscious of those qualities for which he most highly esteems others.

Self-esteem, grounded upon external advantages, or the gifts of fortune, is pride. When it is grounded upon a vain conceit of inward worth which we do not possess, it is arrogance and self-deceit. But when a man, without thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think, is conscious of that integrity of heart, and uprightness of conduct, which he most highly esteems in others, and values himself duly upon this account; this perhaps may be called the pride of virtue, but it is not a ‹246› vicious pride. It is a noble and magnanimous disposition, without which there can be no steady virtue.

A man who has a character with himself, which he values, will disdain to act in a manner unworthy of it. The language of his heart will be like that of JOB, ‘My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart

shall not reproach me while I live.'[101]

A good man owes much to his character with the world, and will be concerned to vindicate it from unjust imputations. But he owes much more to his character with himself. For if his heart condemns him not, he has confidence towards GOD; and he can more easily bear the lash of tongues than the reproach of his own mind.

The sense of honour, so much spoken of, and so often misapplied, is nothing else, when rightly understood, but the disdain which a man of worth feels to do a dishonourable action, though it should never be known nor suspected.

A good man will have a much greater abhorrence against doing a bad action, than even against having it unjustly imputed to him. The last may give a wound to his reputation, but the first gives a wound to his conscience, which is more difficult to heal, and more painful to endure.

Let us, on the other hand, consider how we are affected by disapprobation, either of the conduct of others, or of our own.

Every thing we disapprove in the conduct of a man lessens him in our esteem. There are indeed brilliant faults, which, having a mixture of good and ill in them, may have a very different aspect, according to the side on which we view them.

‹247› In such faults of our friends, and much more of ourselves, we are disposed to view them on the best side, and on the contrary side in those to whom we are ill affected.

This partiality, in taking things by the best or by the worst handle, is the chief cause of wrong judgment with regard to the character of others, and of self-deceit with regard to our own.

But when we take complex actions to pieces, and view every part by itself, ill conduct of every kind lessens our esteem of a man, as much as good conduct increases it. It is apt to turn love into indifference, indifference into contempt, and contempt into aversion and abhorrence.

When a man is conscious of immoral conduct in himself, it lessens his self-esteem. It depresses and humbles his spirit, and makes his countenance to fall. He could even punish himself for his misbehaviour, if that could wipe out the stain. There is a sense of dishonour and worthlessness arising from guilt, as well as a sense of honour and worth arising from worthy conduct. And this is the case, even if a man could conceal his guilt from all the world.

101. Job 27:6.

We are next to consider the agreeable or uneasy feelings, in the breast of the spectator or judge, which naturally accompany moral approbation and disapprobation.

There is no affection that is not accompanied with some agreeable or uneasy emotion. It has often been observed, that all the benevolent affections give pleasure, and the contrary ones pain, in one degree or another.

When we contemplate a noble character, though but in ancient history, or even in fiction; like a beautiful object, it gives ‹248› a lively and pleasant emotion to the spirits. It warms the heart, and invigorates the whole frame. Like the beams of the sun, it enlivens the face of nature, and diffuses heat and light all around.

We feel a sympathy with every noble and worthy character that is represented to us. We rejoice in his prosperity, we are afflicted in his distress. We even catch some sparks of that celestial fire that animated his conduct, and feel the glow of his virtue and magnanimity.

This sympathy is the necessary effect of our judgment of his conduct, and of the approbation and esteem due to it; for real sympathy is always the effect of some benevolent affection, such as esteem, love, pity or humanity.

When the person whom we approve is connected with us by acquaintance, friendship or blood, the pleasure we derive from his conduct is greatly increased. We claim some property in his worth, and are apt to value ourselves on account of it. This shews a stronger degree of sympathy, which gathers strength from every social tie.

But the highest pleasure of all is, when we are conscious of good conduct in ourselves. This, in sacred scripture, is called the *testimony of a good conscience*;[102] and it is represented, not only in the sacred writings, but in the writings of all moralists, of every age and sect, as the purest, the most noble and valuable of all human enjoyments.

Surely, were we to place the chief happiness of this life (a thing that has been so much sought after) in any one kind of enjoyment, that which arises from the consciousness of integrity, and a uniform endeavour to act the best part in our station, would most justly claim the preference to all other enjoyments the ‹249› human mind is capable of, on account of its dignity, the intenseness of the happiness it affords, its stability and

102. See 2 Corinthians 1:12.

duration, its being in our power, and its being proof against all accidents of time and fortune.

On the other hand, the view of a vicious character, like that of an ugly and deformed object, is disagreeable. It gives disgust and abhorrence.

If the unworthy person be nearly connected with us, we have a very painful sympathy indeed. We blush even for the smaller faults of those we are connected with, and feel ourselves, as it were, dishonoured by their ill conduct.

But, when there is a high degree of depravity in any person connected with us, we are deeply humbled and depressed by it. The sympathetic feeling has some resemblance to that of guilt, though it be free from all guilt. We are ashamed to see our acquaintance; we would, if possible, disclaim all connection with the guilty person. We wish to tear him from our hearts, and to blot him out of our remembrance.

Time, however, alleviates those sympathetic sorrows which arise from bad behaviour in our friends and connections, if we are conscious that we had no share in their guilt.

The wisdom of GOD, in the constitution of our nature, hath intended, that this sympathetic distress should interest us the more deeply in the good behaviour, as well as in the good fortune of our friends; and that thereby friendship, relation and every social tie, should be aiding to virtue and unfavourable to vice.

How common is it, even in vicious parents, to be deeply afflicted when their children go into these courses in which per ‹250›haps they have gone before them, and, by their example, shewn them the way.

If bad conduct in those in whom we are interested, be uneasy and painful, it is so much more when we are conscious of it in ourselves. This uneasy feeling has a name in all languages. We call it *remorse.*

It has been described in such frightful colours by writers sacred and profane, by writers of every age and of every persuasion, even by Epicureans, that I will not attempt the description of it.

It is on account of the uneasiness of this feeling, that bad men take so much pains to get rid of it, and to hide, even from their own eyes, as much as possible, the pravity of their conduct. Hence arise all the arts of self-deceit, by which men varnish their crimes, or endeavour to wash out the stain of guilt. Hence the various methods of expiation which superstition has invented, to solace the conscience of the criminal, and give some cooling to his parched breath. Hence also arise, very often, the efforts of men of bad hearts to excel in some amiable quality, which may be a kind

of counterpoise to their vices, both in the opinion of others and in their own.

For no man can bear the thought of being absolutely destitute of all worth. The consciousness of this would make him detest himself, hate the light of the sun, and fly, if possible, out of existence.

I have now endeavoured to delineate the natural operations of that principle of action in man, which we call the *moral sense,* the *moral faculty, conscience.* We know nothing of our natural faculties, but by their operations within us. Of their operations in our own minds, we are conscious, and we see the signs of ‹251› their operations in the minds of others. Of this faculty the operations appear to be, the judging ultimately of what is right, what is wrong, and what is indifferent in the conduct of moral agents; the approbation of good conduct and disapprobation of bad in consequence of that judgment, and the agreeable emotions which attend obedience, and disagreeable which attend disobedience to its dictates.

The Supreme Being, who has given us eyes to discern what may be useful and what hurtful to our natural life, hath also given us this light within to direct our moral conduct.

Moral conduct is the business of every man; and therefore the knowledge of it ought to be within the reach of all.

EPICURUS reasoned acutely and justly to shew, that a regard to our present happiness should induce us to the practice of temperance, justice and humanity.[103] But the bulk of mankind cannot follow long trains of reasoning. The loud voice of the passions drowns the calm and still voice of reasoning.

Conscience commands and forbids with more authority, and in the most common and most important points of conduct, without the labour of reasoning. Its voice is heard by every man, and cannot be disregarded with impunity.

The sense of guilt makes a man at variance with himself. He sees that he is what he ought not to be. He has fallen from the dignity of his nature, and has sold his real worth for a thing of no value. He is conscious of demerit, and cannot avoid the dread of meeting with its reward.

On the other hand, he who pays a sacred regard to the dictates of his conscience, cannot fail of a present reward, and a reward proportioned to the exertion required in doing his duty.

103. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, X.132, 140.

‹252› The man who, in opposition to strong temptation, by a noble effort, maintains his integrity, is the happiest man on earth. The more severe his conflict has been, the greater is his triumph. The consciousness of inward worth gives strength to his heart, and makes his countenance to shine. Tempests may beat and floods roar, but he stands firm as a rock in the joy of a good conscience, and confidence of divine approbation.[104]

To this I shall only add, what every man's conscience dictates, That he who does his duty, from the conviction that it is right and honourable, and what he ought to do, acts from a nobler principle, and with more inward satisfaction, than he who is bribed to do it, merely from the consideration of a reward present or future.

CHAP. VIII.

Observations concerning Conscience.

I shall now conclude this Essay with some observations concerning this power of the mind which we call *conscience*, by which its nature may be better understood.

The *first* is, That, like all our other powers, it comes to maturity by insensible degrees, and may be much aided in its strength and vigour by proper culture.

All the human faculties have their infancy and their state of maturity.

The faculties which we have in common with the brutes appear first, and have the quickest growth. In the first period of life, children are not capable of distinguishing right from ‹253› wrong in human conduct; neither are they capable of abstract reasoning in matters of science. Their judgment of moral conduct, as well as their judgment of truth, advances by insensible degrees, like the corn and the grass.

In vegetables, first the blade or the leaf appears, then the flower, and last of all the fruit, the noblest production of the three, and that for which the others were produced. These succeed one another in a regular order. They require moisture and heat and air and shelter to bring them to maturity, and may be much improved by culture. According to the variations of soil, season and culture, some plants are brought to much greater perfection than others of the same species. But no variation of culture or season or soil can make grapes grow from thorns, or figs from thistles.

104. Matthew 7:25.

We may observe a similar progress in the faculties of the mind: For there is a wonderful analogy among all the works of GOD, from the least even to the greatest.

The faculties of man unfold themselves in a certain order, appointed by the great Creator. In their gradual progress, they may be greatly assisted or retarded, improved or corrupted, by education, instruction, example, exercise, and by the society and conversation of men, which, like soil and culture in plants, may produce great changes to the better or to the worse.

But these means can never produce any new faculties, nor any other than were originally planted in the mind by the Author of nature. And what is common to the whole species, in all the varieties of instruction and education, of improvement and degeneracy, is the work of GOD, and not the operation of second causes.

Such we may justly account conscience, or the faculty of di ‹254›s - tinguishing right conduct from wrong; since it appears, and in all nations and ages has appeared, in men that are come to maturity.

The seeds, as it were, of moral discernment are planted in the mind by him that made us. They grow up in their proper season, and are at first tender and delicate, and easily warped. Their progress depends very much upon their being duly cultivated and properly exercised.

It is so with the power of reasoning, which all acknowledge to be one of the most eminent natural faculties of man. It appears not in infancy. It springs up, by insensible degrees, as we grow to maturity. But its strength and vigour depend so much upon its being duly cultivated and exercised, that we see many individuals, nay many nations, in which it is hardly to be perceived.

Our intellectual discernment is not so strong and vigorous by nature, as to secure us from errors in speculation. On the contrary, we see a great part of mankind, in every age, sunk in gross ignorance of things that are obvious to the more enlightened, and fettered by errors and false notions, which the human understanding, duly improved, easily throws off.

It would be extremely absurd, from the errors and ignorance of mankind, to conclude that there is no such thing as truth; or that man has not a natural faculty of discerning it, and distinguishing it from error.

In like manner, our moral discernment of what we ought, and what we ought not to do, is not so strong and vigorous by nature, as to secure us from very gross mistakes with regard to our duty.

‹255› In matters of conduct, as well as in matters of speculation, we

are liable to be misled by prejudices of education, or by wrong instruction. But, in matters of conduct, we are also very liable to have our judgment warped by our appetites and passions, by fashion, and by the contagion of evil example.

We must not therefore think, because man has the natural power of discerning what is right and what is wrong, that he has no need of instruction; that this power has no need of cultivation and improvement; that he may safely rely upon the suggestions of his mind, or upon opinions he has got, he knows not how.

What should we think of a man who, because he has by nature the power of moving all his limbs, should therefore conclude that he needs not be taught to dance, or to fence, to ride, or to swim? All these exercises are performed by that power of moving our limbs, which we have by nature; but they will be performed very awkwardly and imperfectly by those who have not been trained to them, and practised in them.

What should we think of the man who, because he has the power by nature of distinguishing what is true from what is false, should conclude that he has no need to be taught mathematics, or natural philosophy, or other sciences? It is by the natural power of human understanding that every thing in those sciences has been discovered, and that the truths they contain are discerned. But the understanding left to itself, without the aid of instruction, training, habit, and exercise, would make very small progress, as every one sees, in persons uninstructed in those matters.

Our natural power of discerning between right and wrong, needs the aid of instruction, education, exercise, and habit, as well as our other natural powers.

‹256› There are persons who, as the scripture speaks, have, by reason of use, their senses exercised to discern both good and evil; [105] by that means, they have a much quicker, clearer, and more certain judgment in morals than others.

The man who neglects the means of improvement in the knowledge of his duty, may do very bad things, while he follows the light of his mind. And though he be not culpable for acting according to his judgment, he may be very culpable for not using the means of having his judgment better informed.

It may be observed, That there are truths, both speculative and moral, which a man left to himself would never discover; yet, when they are

105. See Hebrews 5:14.

fairly laid before him, he owns and adopts them, not barely upon the authority of his teacher, but upon their own intrinsic evidence, and perhaps wonders that he could be so blind as not to see them before.

Like a man whose son has been long abroad, and supposed dead. After many years the son returns, and is not known by his father. He would never find that this is his son. But, when he discovers himself, the father soon finds, by many circumstances, that this is his son who was lost, and can be no other person.

Truth has an affinity with the human understanding, which error hath not. And right principles of conduct have an affinity with a candid mind, which wrong principles have not. When they are set before it in a just light, a well disposed mind recognises this affinity, feels their authority, and perceives them to be genuine. It was this, I apprehend, that led PLATO to conceive that the knowledge we acquire in the present state, is only reminiscence of what, in a former state, we were acquainted with.[106]

‹257› A man born and brought up in a savage nation, may be taught to pursue injury with unrelenting malice, to the destruction of his enemy. Perhaps when he does so, his heart does not condemn him.

Yet, if he be fair and candid, and, when the tumult of passion is over, have the virtues of clemency, generosity, and forgiveness, laid before him, as they were taught and exemplified by the divine Author of our religion, he will see, that it is more noble to overcome himself, and subdue a savage passion, than to destroy his enemy. He will see, that to make a friend of an enemy, and to overcome evil with good, is the greatest of all victories, and gives a manly and a rational delight, with which the brutish passion of revenge deserves not to be compared. He will see that hitherto he acted like a man to his friends, but like a brute to his enemies; now he knows how to make his whole character consistent, and one part of it to harmonize with another.

He must indeed be a great stranger to his own heart, and to the state of human nature, who does not see that he has need of all the aid which his situation affords him, in order to know how he ought to act in many cases that occur.

A *second* observation is, That conscience is peculiar to man. We see not a vestige of it in brute-animals. It is one of those prerogatives by which we are raised above them.

106. See *Meno*, 81a–86b.

Brute-animals have many faculties in common with us. They see, and hear, and taste, and smell, and feel. They have their pleasures and pains. They have various instincts and appetites. They have an affection for their offspring, and some of them for their herd or flock. Dogs have a wonderful attachment to their masters, and give manifest signs of sympathy with them.

‹258› We see, in brute-animals, anger and emulation, pride and shame. Some of them are capable of being trained by habit, and by rewards and punishments, to many things useful to man.

All this must be granted; and if our perception of what we ought, and what we ought not to do, could be resolved into any of these principles, or into any combination of them, it would follow, that some brutes are moral agents, and accountable for their conduct.

But common sense revolts against this conclusion. A man who seriously charged a brute with a crime, would be laughed at. They may do actions hurtful to themselves, or to man. They may have qualities, or acquire habits, that lead to such actions; and this is all we mean when we call them vicious. But they cannot be immoral; nor can they be virtuous. They are not capable of self-government; and, when they act according to the passion or habit which is strongest at the time, they act according to the nature that GOD has given them, and no more can be required of them.

They cannot lay down a rule to themselves, which they are not to transgress, though prompted by appetite, or ruffled by passion. We see no reason to think that they can form the conception of a general rule, or of obligation to adhere to it.

They have no conception of a promise or contract; nor can you enter into any treaty with them. They can neither affirm nor deny, nor resolve, nor plight their faith. If nature had made them capable of these operations, we should see the signs of them in their motions and gestures.

The most sagacious brutes never invented a language, nor learned the use of one before invented. They never formed a ‹259› plan of government, nor transmitted inventions to their posterity.

These things, and many others that are obvious to common obser - vation, shew that there is just reason why mankind have always considered the brute-creation as destitute of the noblest faculties with which GOD hath endowed man, and particularly of that faculty which makes us moral and accountable beings.

The *next* observation is, That conscience is evidently intended by nature to be the immediate guide and director of our conduct, after we

arrive at the years of understanding.[107]

There are many things, which, from their nature and structure, shew intuitively the end for which they were made.

A man who knows the structure of a watch or clock, can have no doubt in concluding that it was made to measure time. And he that knows the structure of the eye, and the properties of light, can have as little doubt whether it was made that we might see by it.

In the fabric of the body, the intention of the several parts is, in many instances, so evident, as to leave no possibility of doubt. Who can doubt whether the muscles were intended to move the parts in which they are inserted? Whether the bones were intended to give strength and support to the body; and some of them to guard the parts which they inclose?

When we attend to the structure of the mind, the intention of its various original powers is no less evident. Is it not evident, that the external senses are given, that we may discern those qualities of bodies which may be useful or hurtful to us? Memory, that we may retain the knowledge we have acquired: ‹260› Judgment and understanding, that we may distinguish what is true from what is false?

The natural appetites of hunger and thirst, the natural affections of parents to their offspring, and of relations to each other, the natural docility and credulity of children, the affections of pity and sympathy with the distressed, the attachment we feel to neighbours, to acquaintance, and to the laws and constitution of our country; these are parts of our constitution, which plainly point out their end, so that he must be blind, or very inattentive, who does not perceive it. Even the passions of anger and resentment, appear very plainly to be a kind of defensive armour, given by our Maker to guard us against injuries, and to deter the injurious.

Thus it holds generally with regard both to the intellectual and active powers of man, that the intention for which they are given, is written in legible characters upon the face of them.

Nor is this the case of any of them more evidently than of conscience. Its intention is manifestly implied in its office; which is, to shew us what is good, what bad, and what indifferent in human conduct.

It judges of every action before it is done. For we can rarely act so

107. Much of what follows in support of this observation is heavily indebted to Joseph Butler's account of conscience in the Preface and first three Sermons of the *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*.

precipitately, but we have the consciousness that what we are about to do is right, or wrong, or indifferent. Like the bodily eye, it naturally looks forward, though its attention may be turned back to the past.

To conceive, as some seem to have done, that its office is only to reflect on past actions, and to approve or disapprove, is, as if a man should conceive, that the office of his eyes is only to look back upon the road he has travelled, and to see whether it be ‹261› clean or dirty; a mistake which no man can make who has made the proper use of his eyes.

Conscience prescribes measures to every appetite, affection, and passion, and says to every other principle of action, So far thou mayest go, but no farther.

We may indeed transgress its dictates, but we cannot transgress them with innocence, nor even with impunity.

We condemn ourselves, or, in the language of scripture, *our heart condemns us*,[108] whenever we go beyond the rules of right and wrong which conscience prescribes.

Other principles of action may have more strength, but this only has authority. Its sentence makes us guilty to ourselves, and guilty in the eyes of our Maker, whatever other principle may be set in opposition to it.

It is evident therefore, that this principle has, from its nature, an authority to direct and determine with regard to our conduct; to judge, to acquit, or to condemn, and even to punish; an authority which belongs to no other principle of the human mind.

It is the candle of the LORD[109] set up within us, to guide our steps. Other principles may urge and impel, but this only authorises. Other principles ought to be controlled by this; this may be, but never ought to be controlled by any other, and never can be with innocence.

The authority of conscience over the other active principles of the mind, I do not consider as a point that requires proof by argument, but as self-evident. For it implies no more than this, ‹262› That in all cases a man ought to do his duty. He only who does in all cases what he ought to do, is the perfect man.

Of this perfection in the human nature, the Stoics formed the idea, and held it forth in their writings, as the goal to which the race of life ought to be directed. Their *wise man* was one in whom a regard to the *honestum* swallowed up every other principle of action.

108. 1 John 3:20.

109. Proverbs 20:27: ‘The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all inward parts of the belly.’

The *wise man* of the Stoics, like the *perfect orator* of the rhetoricians, was an ideal character, and was, in some respects, carried beyond nature; yet it was perhaps the most perfect model of virtue, that ever was exhibited to the heathen world; and some of those who copied after it, were ornaments to human nature.

The *last* observation is, That the moral faculty or conscience is both an active and an intellectual power of the mind.

It is an active power, as every truly virtuous action must be more or less influenced by it. Other principles may concur with it, and lead the same way; but no action can be called morally good, in which a regard to what is right, has not some influence. Thus a man who has no regard to justice, may pay his just debt, from no other motive, but that he may not be thrown into prison. In this action there is no virtue at all.

The moral principle, in particular cases, may be opposed by any of our animal principles. Passion or appetite may urge to what we know to be wrong. In every instance of this kind, the moral principle ought to prevail, and the more difficult its conquest is, it is the more glorious.

In some cases, a regard to what is right may be the sole motive, without the concurrence or opposition of any other prin ‹263›ciple of action; as when a judge or an arbiter determines a plea between two indifferent persons, solely from a regard to justice.

Thus we see, that conscience, as an active principle, sometimes con - curs with other active principles, sometimes opposes them, and sometimes is the sole principle of action.

I endeavoured before to shew, that a regard to our own good upon the whole is not only a rational principle of action, but a leading principle, to which all our animal principles are subordinate. As these are, therefore, two regulating or leading principles in the constitution of man, a regard to what is best for us upon the whole, and a regard to duty, it may be asked, Which of these ought to yield if they happen to interfere?

Some well meaning persons have maintained, That all regard to ourselves and to our own happiness ought to be extinguished; that we should love virtue for its own sake only, even though it were to be accompanied with eternal misery.

This seems to have been the extravagance of some Mystics, which perhaps they were led into, in opposition to a contrary extreme of the schoolmen of the middle ages, who made the desire of good to ourselves to be the sole motive to action, and virtue to be approvable only on account of its present or future reward.

Juster views of human nature will teach us to avoid both these extremes.

On the one hand, the disinterested love of virtue is undoubtedly the noblest principle in human nature, and ought never to stoop to any other.

‹264› On the other hand, there is no active principle which GOD hath planted in our nature that is vicious in itself, or that ought to be eradicated, even if it were in our power.

They are all useful and necessary in our present state. The perfection of human nature consists, not in extinguishing, but in restraining them within their proper bounds, and keeping them in due subordination to the governing principles.

As to the supposition of an opposition between the two governing principles, that is, between a regard to our happiness upon the whole, and a regard to duty, this supposition is merely imaginary. There can be no such opposition.

While the world is under a wise and benevolent administration, it is impossible, that any man should, in the issue, be a loser by doing his duty. Every man, therefore, who believes in GOD, while he is careful to do his duty, may safely leave the care of his happiness to him who made him. He is conscious that he consults the last most effectually by attending to the first.

Indeed, if we suppose a man to be an atheist in his belief, and, at the same time, by wrong judgment, to believe that virtue is contrary to his happiness upon the whole, this case, as Lord SHAFTESBURY justly observes, is without remedy.[110] It will be impossible for the man to act, so as not to contradict a leading principle of his nature. He must either sacrifice his happiness to virtue, or virtue to happiness; and is reduced to this miserable dilemma, whether it be best to be a fool or a knave.

This shews the strong connection between morality and the principles of natural religion; as the last only can secure a man from the possibility of an apprehension, that he may play the fool by doing his duty.

‹265› Hence, even Lord SHAFTESBURY, in his gravest work, concludes, *That virtue without piety is incomplete.*[111] Without piety, it loses its brightest example, its noblest object, and its firmest support.

I conclude with observing, That conscience, or the moral faculty, is

110. Shaftesbury, ‘An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit’, Book 1, Part 3, Section 3; *Characteristicks,* vol. 2, p. 40. Shaftesbury’s observation is cited also in the Preface to Butler’s *Sermons*.

111. Shaftesbury,‘Inquiry’, Book 1, Conclusion; *Characteristicks*, vol. 2, p. 44.

likewise an intellectual power.

By it solely we have the original conceptions or ideas of right and wrong in human conduct. And of right and wrong, there are not only many different degrees, but many different species. Justice and injustice, gratitude and ingratitude, benevolence and malice, prudence and folly, magnanimity and meanness, decency and indecency, are various moral forms, all comprehended under the general notion of right and wrong in conduct, all of them objects of moral approbation or disapprobation, in a greater or a less degree.

The conception of these, as moral qualities, we have by our moral faculty; and by the same faculty, when we compare them together, we perceive various moral relations among them. Thus, we perceive, that justice is entitled to a small degree of praise, but injustice to a high degree of blame; and the same may be said of gratitude and its contrary. When justice and gratitude interfere, gratitude must give place to justice, and unmerited beneficence must give place to both.

Many such relations between the various moral qualities compared together, are immediately discerned by our moral faculty. A man needs only to consult his own heart to be convinced of them.

All our reasonings in morals, in natural jurisprudence, in the law of nations, as well as our reasonings about the duties of natural religion, and about the moral government of the Deity, ‹266› must be grounded upon the dictates of our moral faculty, as first principles.

As this faculty, therefore, furnishes the human mind with many of its original conceptions or ideas, as well as with the first principles of many important branches of human knowledge, it may justly be accounted an intellectual, as well as an active power of the mind.

‹267›

ESSAY IV.[1]

OF THE LIBERTY OF MORAL AGENTS.

CHAP. I.

The Notions of Moral Liberty and Necessity stated.

BY the *liberty* of a moral agent, I understand, a power over the determinations of his own will.

If, in any action, he had power to will what he did, or not to will it, in that action he is free. But if, in every voluntary action, the determination of his will be the necessary consequence of something involuntary in the state of his mind, or of something in his external circumstances, he is not free; he has not what I call the liberty of a moral agent, but is subject to necessity.

This liberty supposes the agent to have understanding and will; for the determinations of the will are the sole object about which this power is employed; and there can be no will without such a degree of understanding, at least, as gives the conception of that which we will.

The liberty of a moral agent implies, not only a conception of what he wills, but some degree of practical judgment or reason.

For, if he has not the judgment to discern one determination ‹268› to

1. Reid articulated some of his central ideas on this topic already in 1736 (3/III/1; 6/I/17) and again in his 1765 lectures (7/V/15, 1–2). There are early abstracts of *A Collection of Papers which passed between the late Learned Mr. Leibnitz and Dr. Clarke in the years 1715 and 1716 relating to the Principles of Natural Philosophy and Religion*, and of Clarke's criticism of Collins, *Remarks upon a Book, Entitled, A Philosophical Enquiry concerning Human Liberty*; see 3/II/7 and 3/III/8. A significant development seems to have been in response to a Dutch prize essay competition, for which three substantial drafts have been preserved (7/IV/4, 2–32; 2/II/9; 2/II/15; additional material in 2/I/14, 1–8 and 7/IV/3; see Editors' Introduction, pp. xiii–xv). He then recast the arguments in three discourses to the Glasgow Literary Society in 1784–6. Of these, the first (3061/20) is a preparation for Chaps. 1–3; the second (3061/22, 1–2) is a brief sketch towards Chap. 4; while the third is only mentioned as concerned with the three arguments for necessity that Reid considers at the end of Chap. 11 of the present Essay (3061/22, 3). In 3/II/6, Reid canvasses several central themes in a concentrated discussion of Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of Will*. Cf. also 7/IV/6, 2–8.

be preferable to another, either in itself, or for some purpose which he intends, what can be the use of a power to determine? His determinations must be made perfectly in the dark, without reason, motive or end. They can neither be right nor wrong, wise nor foolish. Whatever the consequences may be, they cannot be imputed to the agent, who had not the capacity of foreseeing them, or of perceiving any reason for acting otherwise than he did.

We may perhaps be able to conceive a being endowed with power over the determinations of his will, without any light in his mind to direct that power to some end. But such power would be given in vain. No exercise of it could be either blamed or approved. As nature gives no power in vain, I see no ground to ascribe a power over the determinations of the will to any being who has no judgment to apply it to the direction of his conduct, no discernment of what he ought or ought not to do.

For that reason, in this Essay, I speak only of the liberty of moral agents, who are capable of acting well or ill, wisely or foolishly, and this, for distinction's sake, I shall call *moral liberty*.

What kind, or what degree of liberty belongs to brute animals, or to our own species, before any use of reason, I do not know. We acknowledge that they have not the power of self-government. Such of their actions as may be called *voluntary*, seem to be invariably determined by the passion or appetite, or affection or habit which is strongest at the time.

This seems to be the law of their constitution, to which they yield, as the inanimate creation does, without any conception of the law, or any intention of obedience.

But of civil or moral government, which are addressed to the ‹269› rational powers, and require a conception of the law and an intentional obedience, they are, in the judgment of all mankind, incapable. Nor do I see what end could be served by giving them a power over the determinations of their own will, unless to make them intractable by discipline, which we see they are not.

The effect of moral liberty is, That it is in the power of the agent to do well or ill. This power, like every other gift of God, may be abused. The right use of this gift of God is to do well and wisely, as far as his best judgment can direct him, and thereby merit esteem and approbation. The abuse of it is to act contrary to what he knows or suspects to be his duty and his wisdom, and thereby justly merit disapprobation and blame.

By *necessity*, I understand the want of that moral liberty which I have above defined.

If there can be a better and a worse in actions on the system of necessity, let us suppose a man necessarily determined in all cases to will and to do what is best to be done, he would surely be innocent and inculpable. But, as far as I am able to judge, he would not be entitled to the esteem and moral approbation of those who knew and believed this necessity. What was, by an ancient author, said of CATO, might indeed be said of him. *He was good because he could not be otherwise*.[2] But this saying, if understood literally and strictly, is not the praise of CATO, but of his constitution, which was no more the work of CATO, than his existence.

On the other hand, if a man be necessarily determined to do ill, this case seems to me to move pity, but not disapprobation. He was ill, because he could not be otherwise. Who can blame him? Necessity has no law.

‹270› If he knows that he acted under this necessity, has he not just ground to exculpate himself? The blame, if there be any, is not in him, but in his constitution. If he be charged by his Maker with doing wrong, may he not expostulate with him, and say, Why hast thou made me thus? I may be sacrificed at thy pleasure, for the common good, like a man that has the plague, but not for ill desert; for thou knowest that what I am charged with is thy work, and not mine.

Such are my notions of moral liberty and necessity, and of the consequences inseparably connected with both the one and the other.

This moral liberty a man may have, though it do not extend to all his actions, or even to all his voluntary actions. He does many things by instinct, many things by the force of habit without any thought at all, and consequently without will. In the first part of life, he has not the power of self-government any more than the brutes. That power over the determinations of his own will, which belongs to him in ripe years, is limited, as all his powers are; and it is perhaps beyond the reach of his understanding to define its limits with precision. We can only say, in general, that it extends to every action for which he is accountable.

This power is given by his Maker, and at his pleasure whose gift it is, it may be enlarged or diminished, continued or withdrawn. No power in

2. The ancient author was the Roman historian Gaius Velleius Paterculus, according to whom Cato ‘never did a right action solely for the sake of seeming good, but because he could not do otherwise’: *Historiae Romanae*, Book 2, Chap. 35, p. 125.

the creature can be independent of the Creator. His hook is in its nose; [3] he can give it line as far as he feels fit, and, when he pleases, can restrain it, or turn it whithersoever he will. Let this be always understood, when we ascribe liberty to man, or to any created being.

Supposing it therefore to be true, That man is a free agent, it may be true, at the same time, that his liberty may be impaired or lost, by disorder of body or mind, as in melancholy, ‹271› or in madness; it may be impaired or lost by vicious habits; it may, in particular cases, be restrained by divine interposition.

We call man a free agent in the same way as we call him a reasonable agent. In many things he is not guided by reason, but by principles similar to those of the brutes. His reason is weak at best. It is liable to be impaired or lost, by his own fault, or by other means. In like manner, he may be a free agent, though his freedom of action may have many similar limitations.

The liberty I have described has been represented by some Philosophers as inconceivable, and as involving an absurdity.

'Liberty,' they say, 'consists only in a power to act as we will; and it is impossible to conceive in any being a greater liberty than this. Hence it follows, that liberty does not extend to the determinations of the will, but only to the actions consequent to its determination, and depending upon the will. To say that we have power to will such an action, is to say, that we may will it, if we will. This supposes the will to be determined by a prior will; and, for the same reason, that will must be determined by a will prior to it, and so on in an infinite series of wills, which is absurd. To act freely, therefore, can mean nothing more than to act voluntarily; and this is all the liberty that can be conceived in man, or in any being.'

This reasoning, first, I think, advanced by HOBBES, has been very generally adopted by the defenders of necessity. [4] It is grounded upon a

3. See Job 41:2. In his suggested revisions to the final manuscript of *Essays on the Active Powers*, Dugald Stewart commented: 'The allusion to the leviathan in Job is beautiful, but I am afraid it is not sufficiently marked to be observed by every reader' (1/II/3, 78). Apparently, Reid disagreed.

4. Hobbes defines liberty in this way in various places, including *Of Liberty and Necessity*, §§3, 19, and *The Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance*, §§3, 19, 20, 25. See also *Leviathan*, Chap. 21. Similar arguments are found in Locke, *Essay*, II.xxi.25; Anthony Collins, *A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty*; Edwards, *Freedom of Will*; Priestley, *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity*. Leibniz's writings on freedom also deploy this kind of reasoning.

definition of liberty totally different from that which I have given, and therefore does not apply to moral liberty, as above defined.

But it is said that this is the only liberty that is possible, that is conceivable, that does not involve an absurdity.

‹272› It is strange, indeed! if the word *liberty* has no meaning but this one. I shall mention three all very common. The objection applies to one of them, but to neither of the other two.

Liberty is sometimes opposed to external force or confinement of the body. Sometimes it is opposed to obligation by law, or by lawful auth - ority. Sometimes it is opposed to necessity.

1. It is opposed to the confinement of the body by superior force. So we say a prisoner is set at liberty when his fetters are knocked off, and he is discharged from confinement. This is the liberty defined in the objection; and I grant that this liberty extends not to the will, neither does the confinement, because the will cannot be confined by external force.

2. Liberty is opposed to obligation by law, or lawful authority. This liberty is a right to act one way or another, in things which the law has neither commanded nor forbidden; and this liberty is meant when we speak of a man's natural liberty, his civil liberty, his Christian liberty. It is evident that this liberty, as well as the obligation opposed to it, extends to the will: For it is the will to obey that makes obedience; the will to transgress that makes a transgression of the law. Without will there can be neither obedience nor transgression. Law supposes a power to obey or to transgress; it does not take away this power, but proposes the motives of duty and of interest, leaving the power to yield to them, or to take the consequence of transgression.

3. Liberty is opposed to necessity, and in this sense it extends to the determinations of the will only, and not to what is consequent to the will.

In every voluntary action, the determination of the will is the first part of the action, upon which alone the moral estima‹273›tion of it depends. It has been made a question among Philosophers, Whether, in every instance, this determination be the necessary consequence of the constitution of the person, and the circumstances in which he is placed; or whether he had not power, in many cases, to determine this way or that?

This has, by some, been called the *philosophical* notion of liberty and necessity;[5] but it is by no means peculiar to Philosophers. The lowest of

5. Reid is surely alluding to Priestley, whose *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated* was published in 1777, with a second edition in 1782.

the vulgar have, in all ages, been prone to have recourse to this necessity, to exculpate themselves or their friends in what they do wrong, though, in the general tenor of their conduct, they act upon the contrary principle.

Whether this notion of moral liberty be conceivable or not, every man must judge for himself. To me there appears no difficulty in conceiving it. I consider the determination of the will as an effect. This effect must have a cause which had power to produce it; and the cause must be either the person himself, whose will it is, or some other being. The first is as easily conceived as the last. If the person was the cause of that determination of his own will, he was free in that action, and it is justly imputed to him, whether it be good or bad. But, if another being was the cause of this determination, either by producing it immediately, or by means and instruments under his direction, then the determination is the act and deed of that being, and is solely imputable to him.

But it is said, 'That nothing is in our power but what depends upon the will, and therefore the will itself cannot be in our power.'

I answer, That this is a fallacy arising from taking a common saying in a sense which it never was intended to convey, and in a sense contrary to what it necessarily implies.

‹274› In common life, when men speak of what is, or is not, in a man's power, they attend only to the external and visible effects, which only can be perceived, and which only can affect them. Of these, it is true, that nothing is in a man's power, but what depends upon his will, and this is all that is meant by this common saying.

But this is so far from excluding his will from being in his power, that it necessarily implies it. For to say that what depends upon the will is in a man's power, but the will is not in his power, is to say that the end is in his power, but the means necessary to that end are not in his power, which is a contradiction.

In many propositions which we express universally, there is an exception necessarily implied, and therefore always understood. Thus when we say that all things depend upon GOD, GOD himself is necessarily excepted. In like manner, when we say, that all that is in our power depends upon the will, the will itself is necessarily excepted: For if the will be not, nothing else can be in our power. Every effect must be in the power of its cause. The determination of the will is an effect, and therefore must be in the power of its cause, whether that cause be the agent himself, or some other being.

From what has been said in this chapter, I hope the notion of moral

liberty will be distinctly understood, and that it appears that this notion is neither inconceivable, nor involves any absurdity or contradiction.

‹275›

CHAP. II.

Of the Words Cause and Effect, Action, and Active Power.[6]

THE writings upon liberty and necessity have been much darkened, by the ambiguity of the words used in reasoning upon that subject. The words *cause* and *effect, action* and *active power, liberty* and *necessity*, are related to each other: The meaning of one determines the meaning of the rest. When we attempt to define them, we can only do it by synonymous words which need definition as much. There is a strict sense in which those words must be used, if we speak and reason clearly about moral liberty; but to keep to this strict sense is difficult, because, in all languages, they have, by custom, got a great latitude of signification.

As we cannot reason about moral liberty, without using those ambiguous words, it is proper to point out, as distinctly as possible, their proper and original meaning, in which they ought to be understood in treating of this subject, and to shew from what causes they have become so ambiguous in all languages, as to darken and embarrass our reasonings upon it.

Every thing that begins to exist, must have a cause of its existence, which had power to give it existence. And every thing that undergoes any change, must have some cause of that change.

That neither existence, nor any mode of existence, can begin without an efficient cause, is a principle that appears very early in the mind of man; and it is so universal, and so firmly rooted in human nature, that the most determined scepticism cannot eradicate it.

‹276› It is upon this principle that we ground the rational belief of a deity. But that is not the only use to which we apply it. Every man's conduct is governed by it every day, and almost every hour of his life. And if it were possible for any man to root out this principle from his mind, he must give up every thing that is called common prudence, and

6. For this and the following chapter, cf. Reid's comments on James Gregory's 'Essay on the Difference between the Relation of Motive and Action, and that of Cause and Effect, in Physics: On Physical and Mathematical Principles', in Reid's *Correspondence*, pp. 249–50.

be fit only to be confined as insane.

From this principle it follows, That every thing which undergoes any change, must either be the efficient cause of that change in itself, or it must be changed by some other being.

In the *first* case it is said to have *active power*, and to *act* in producing that change. In the *second* case it is merely *passive*, or is *acted upon*, and the active power is in that being only which produces the change.

The name of a *cause* and of an *agent*, is properly given to that being only, which, by its active power, produces some change in itself, or in some other being. The change, whether it be of thought, of will, or of motion, is the *effect*. Active power therefore, is a quality in the cause, which enables it to produce the effect. And the exertion of that active power in producing the effect, is called *action, agency, efficiency*.

In order to the production of any effect, there must be in the cause, not only power, but the exertion of that power: For power that is not exerted produces no effect.

All that is necessary to the production of any effect, is power in an efficient cause to produce the effect, and the exertion of that power: For it is a contradiction to say, that the cause has power to produce the effect, and exerts that power, and yet the effect is not produced. The effect cannot be in his power unless all the means necessary to its production be in his power.

‹277› It is no less a contradiction to say, that a cause has power to produce a certain effect, but that he cannot exert that power: For power which cannot be exerted is no power, and is a contradiction in terms.

To prevent mistake, it is proper to observe, That a being may have a power at one time which it has not at another. It may commonly have a power, which, at a particular time, it has not. Thus, a man may commonly have power to walk or to run; but he has not this power when asleep, or when he is confined by superior force. In common language, he may be said to have a power which he cannot then exert. But this popular expression means only that he commonly has this power, and will have it when the cause is removed which at present deprives him of it: For when we speak strictly and philosophically, it is a contradiction to say that he has this power, at that moment when he is deprived of it.

These, I think, are necessary consequences from the principle first mentioned, That every change which happens in nature must have an efficient cause which had power to produce it.

Another principle, which appears very early in the mind of man, is,

That we are efficient causes in our deliberate and voluntary actions.

We are conscious of making an exertion, sometimes with difficulty, in order to produce certain effects. An exertion made deliberately and voluntarily, in order to produce an effect, implies a conviction that the effect is in our power. No man can deliberately attempt what he does not believe to be in his power. The language of all mankind, and their ordinary conduct in life, demonstrate, that they have a conviction of some active power in themselves to produce certain motions in their own and in other bodies, and to regulate and direct their own thoughts.‹278› This conviction we have so early in life, that we have no remembrance when, or in what way we acquired it.

That such a conviction is at first the necessary result of our constitution, and that it can never be entirely obliterated, is, I think, acknowledged by one of the most zealous defenders of necessity. *Free Discussion, &c. p.* 298. 'Such are the influences to which all mankind, without distinction, are exposed, that they necessarily refer actions (I mean refer them ultimately) first of all to themselves and others; and it is a long time before they begin to consider themselves and others as instruments in the hand of a superior agent. Consequently, the associations which refer actions to themselves get so confirmed, that they are never entirely obliterated; and therefore the common language, and the common feelings of mankind, will be adapted to the first, the limited and imperfect, or rather erroneous view of things.'[7]

It is very probable, that the very conception or idea of active power, and of efficient causes, is derived from our voluntary exertions in producing effects; and that, if we were not conscious of such exertions, we should have no conception at all of a cause, or of active power, and consequently no conviction of the necessity of a cause of every change which we observe in nature.

It is certain that we can conceive no kind of active power but what is similar or analogous to that which we attribute to ourselves; that is, a power which is exerted by will and with understanding. Our notion, even of Almighty power, is derived from the notion of human power, by removing from the former those imperfections and limitations to which the latter is subjected.

It may be difficult to explain the origin of our conceptions ‹279› and

7. Priestley, *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity*, pp. 297–8.

belief concerning efficient causes and active power. The common theory, that all our ideas are ideas of sensation or reflection, and that all our belief is a perception of the agreement or the disagreement of those ideas, appears to be repugnant, both to the idea of an efficient cause, and to the belief of its necessity.[8]

An attachment to that theory has led some Philosophers to deny that we have any conception of an efficient cause, or of active power, because efficiency and active power are not ideas, either of sensation or reflection. They maintain, therefore, that a cause is only something prior to the effect, and constantly conjoined with it. This is Mr HUME's notion of a cause, and seems to be adopted by Dr PRIESTLEY, who says, 'That a cause cannot be defined to be any thing, but *such previous circumstances as are constantly followed by a certain effect*, the constancy of the result making us conclude, that there must be a *sufficient reason*, in the nature of the things, why it should be produced in those circumstances.'[9]

But theory ought to stoop to fact, and not fact to theory. Every man who understands the language knows, that neither priority, nor constant conjunction, nor both taken together, imply efficiency. Every man, free from prejudice, must assent to what CICERO has said: *Itaque non sic causa intelligi debet, ut quod cuique antecedat, id et causa sit, sed quod cuique efficienter antecedit*.[10]

The very dispute, whether we have the conception of an efficient cause, shows that we have. For though men may dispute about things which have no existence, they cannot dispute about things of which they have no conception.

What has been said in this chapter is intended to shew, That the conception of causes, of action and of active power, in the strict and proper sense of these words, is found in the minds of ‹280› all men very early, even in the dawn of their rational life. It is therefore probable, that, in all languages, the words by which these conceptions were expressed were at first distinct and unambiguous, yet it is certain, that, among the most enlightened nations, these words are applied to so many things of

8. The 'common theory' is a conjunction of Locke's account of the origins of ideas with his definition of knowledge.
9. Priestley, *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, p. 11; compare Hume, *Treatise*, 1.3.14.35: SBN 172.
10. Transl. 'Accordingly "cause" is not to be understood in such a way as to make what precedes a thing the cause of that thing, but what precedes it effectively': Cicero, *De fato* XV (35), p. 231.

different natures, and used in so vague a manner, that it is very difficult to reason about them distinctly.

This phænomenon, at first view, seems very unaccountable. But a little reflection may satisfy us, that it is a natural consequence of the slow and gradual progress of human knowledge.

And since the ambiguity of these words has so great influence upon our reasoning about moral liberty, and furnishes the strongest objections against it, it is not foreign to our subject to shew whence it arises. When we know the causes that have produced this ambiguity, we shall be less in danger of being misled by it, and the proper and strict meaning of the words will more evidently appear.

‹281›

CHAP. III.

Causes of the Ambiguity of those Words.

WHEN we turn our attention to external objects, and begin to exercise our rational faculties about them, we find, that there are some motions and changes in them, which we have power to produce, and that they have many which must have some other cause. Either the objects must have life and active power, as we have, or they must be moved or changed by something that has life and active power, as external objects are moved by us.

Our first thoughts seem to be, That the objects in which we perceive such motion have understanding and active power as we have.

'Savages,' says the Abbé RAYNAL, 'wherever they see motion which they cannot account for, there they suppose a soul.'[11]

All men may be considered as savages in this respect, until they are capable of instruction, and of using their faculties in a more perfect manner than savages do.

The rational conversations of birds and beasts in ÆSOP's Fables do not shock the belief of children. They have that probability in them which we require in an epic poem. Poets give us a great deal of pleasure, by clothing every object with intellectual and moral attributes, in metaphor and in other figures. May not the pleasures which we take in this poetical

11. *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, Vol. 5, p. 115.

language, arise, in part, from its correspondence with our earliest sentiments?

‹282› However this may be, the Abbé RAYNAL's observation is sufficiently confirmed, both from fact, and from the structure of all languages.

Rude nations do really believe sun, moon and stars, earth, sea and air, fountains and lakes, to have understanding and active power. To pay homage to them and implore their favour, is a kind of idolatry natural to savages.

All languages carry in their structure the marks of their being formed when this belief prevailed. The distinction of verbs and participles into active and passive, which is found in all languages, must have been originally intended to distinguish what is really active from what is merely passive; and, in all languages, we find active verbs applied to those objects, in which, according to the Abbé RAYNAL's observation, savages suppose a soul.

Thus we say the sun rises and sets, and comes to the meridian, the moon changes, the sea ebbs and flows, the winds blow. Languages were formed by men who believed these objects to have life and active power in themselves. It was therefore proper and natural to express their motions and changes by active verbs.

There is no surer way of tracing the sentiments of nations before they have records than by the structure of their language, which, notwithstanding the changes produced in it by time, will always retain some signatures of the thoughts of those by whom it was invented. When we find the same sentiments indicated in the structure of all languages, those sentiments must have been common to the human species when languages were invented.

When a few of superior intellectual abilities find leisure for ‹283› speculation, they begin to philosophize, and soon discover, that many of those objects which, at first, they believed to be intelligent and active, are really lifeless and passive. This is a very important discovery. It elevates the mind, emancipates from many vulgar superstitions, and invites to farther discoveries of the same kind.

As philosophy advances, life and activity in natural objects retires, and leaves them dead and inactive. Instead of moving voluntarily, we find them to be moved necessarily; instead of acting, we find them to be acted upon; and nature appears as one great machine, where one wheel is turned by another, that by a third; and how far this necessary succession may reach, the Philosopher does not know.

The weakness of human reason makes men prone, when they leave one extreme, to rush into the opposite; and thus philosophy, even in its infancy, may lead men from idolatry and polytheism into atheism, and from ascribing active power to inanimate beings, to conclude all things to be carried on by necessity.

Whatever origin we ascribe to the doctrines of atheism and of fatal necessity, it is certain, that both may be traced almost as far back as philosophy; and both appear to be the opposites of the earliest sentiments of men.

It must have been by the observation and reasoning of the speculative *few*, that those objects were discovered to be inanimate and inactive, to which the *many* ascribed life and activity. But while the *few* are convinced of this, they must speak the language of the *many* in order to be understood. So we see, that when the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, which agrees with vulgar prejudice and with vulgar language, has been universally rejected by Philosophers, they continue to use the phrase - ology that is grounded upon it, not only in speaking to the vul ‹284›gar, but in speaking to one another. They say, The sun rises and sets, and moves annually through all the signs of the zodiac, while they believe that he never leaves his place.

In like manner, those active verbs and participles, which were applied to the inanimate objects of nature, when they were believed to be really active, continue to be applied to them after they are discovered to be passive.

The forms of language, once established by custom, are not so easily changed as the notions on which they were originally founded. While the sounds remain, their signification is gradually enlarged or altered. This is sometimes found, even in those sciences in which the signification of words is the most accurate and precise. Thus, in arithmetic, the word *number*, among the ancients, always signified so many units, and it would have been absurd to apply it either to unity or to any part of an unit; but now we call unity, or any part of unity, a *number*. With them, multiplication always increased a number, and division diminished it; but we speak of multiplying by a fraction, which diminishes, and of dividing by a fraction, which increases the number. We speak of dividing or multiplying by unity, which neither diminishes nor increases a number. These forms of expression, in the ancient language, would have been absurd.

By such changes, in the meaning of words, the language of every civilized nation resembles old furniture new modelled, in which many

things are put to uses for which they were not originally intended, and for which they are not perfectly fitted.

This is one great cause of the imperfection of language, and it appears very remarkably in those verbs and participles which are active in their form, but are frequently used so as to have nothing active in their signification.

‹285› Hence we are authorised by custom to ascribe action and active power to things which we believe to be passive. The proper and original signification of every word, which at first signified action and causation, is buried and lost under that vague meaning which custom has affixed to it.

That there is a real distinction, and perfect opposition, between acting and being acted upon, every man may be satisfied who is capable of reflection. And that this distinction is perceived by all men as soon as they begin to reason, appears by the distinction between active and passive verbs, which is original in all languages, though, from the causes that have been mentioned, they come to be confounded in the progress of human improvement.

Another way in which philosophy has contributed very much to the ambiguity of the words under our consideration, deserves to be mentioned.

The first step into natural philosophy, and what hath commonly been considered as its ultimate end, is the investigation of the causes of the phænomena of nature; that is, the causes of those appearances in nature which are not the effects of human power. *Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*, is the sentiment of every mind that has a turn to speculation.[12]

The knowledge of the causes of things promises no less the enlargement of human power than the gratification of human curiosity; and therefore, among the enlightened part of mankind, this knowledge has been pursued in all ages with an avidity proportioned to its importance.

In nothing does the difference between the intellectual powers of man and those of brutes appear more conspicuous than in this. For in them we perceive no desire to investigate the causes ‹286› of things, nor indeed any sign that they have the proper notion of a cause.

There is reason, however, to apprehend, that, in this investigation, men

12. Transl. ‘Fortunate is he who can understand the causes of things’: Virgil, *Georgics*, Book 2, l. 490.

have wandered much in the dark, and that their success has, by no means, been equal to their desire and expectation.

We easily discover an established order and connection in the phænomena of nature. We learn, in many cases, from what has happened, to know what will happen. The discoveries of this kind, made by common observation, are many, and are the foundation of common prudence in the conduct of life. Philosophers, by more accurate observation and experiment, have made many more; by which arts are improved, and human power, as well as human knowledge, is enlarged.

But, as to the real causes of the phænomena of nature, how little do we know! All our knowledge of things external, must be grounded upon the informations of our senses; but causation and active power are not objects of sense; nor is that always the cause of a phænomenon, which is prior to it, and constantly conjoined with it; otherwise night would be the cause of day, and day the cause of the following night.

It is to this day problematical, whether all the phænomena of the material system be produced by the immediate operation of the First Cause, according to the laws which his wisdom determined, or whether subordinate causes are employed by him in the operations of nature; and, if they be, what their nature, their number, and their different offices are? And whether, in all cases, they act by commission, or, in some, according to their discretion?

When we are so much in the dark with regard to the real ‹287› causes of the phænomena of nature, and have a strong desire to know them, it is not strange, that ingenious men should form numberless conjectures and theories, by which the soul, hungering for knowledge, is fed with chaff instead of wheat.

In a very ancient system, love and strife were made the causes of things. In the Pythagorean and Platonic system, matter, ideas and an intelligent mind. By ARISTOTLE, matter, form and privation. DES CARTES thought that matter and a certain quantity of motion given at first by the Almighty, are sufficient to account for all the phænomena of the natural world. LEIBNITZ, that the universe is made up of monades, active and percipient, which, by their active power received at first, produce all the changes they undergo.

While men thus wandered in the dark in search of causes, unwilling to confess their disappointment, they vainly conceived every thing they stumbled upon to be a cause, and the proper notion of a cause is lost, by giving the name to numberless things which neither are nor can be causes.

This confusion of various things under the name of causes, is the more easily tolerated, because however hurtful it may be to sound philosophy, it has little influence upon the concerns of life. A constant antecedent, or concomitant of the phænomenon whose cause is sought, may answer the purpose of the enquirer, as well as if the real cause were known. Thus a sailor desires to know the cause of the tides, that he may know when to expect high water: He is told that it is high water when the moon is so many hours past the meridian: And now he thinks he knows the cause of the tides. What he takes for the cause answers his purpose, and his mistake does him no harm.

Those philosophers seem to have had the justest views of nature, as well as of the weakness of human understanding, who, ‹288› giving up the pretence of discovering the causes of the operations of nature, have applied themselves to discover, by observation and experiment, the rules, or laws of nature according to which the phænomena of nature are produced.[13]

In compliance with custom, or perhaps, to gratify the avidity of knowing the causes of things, we call the laws of nature causes and active powers. So we speak of the powers of gravitation, of magnetism, of electricity.

We call them causes of many of the phænomena of nature; and such they are esteemed by the ignorant, and by the half learned.

But those of juster discernment see, that the laws of nature are not agents. They are not endowed with active power, and therefore cannot be causes in the proper sense. They are only the rules according to which the unknown cause acts.

Thus it appears, that our natural desire to know the causes of the phænomena of nature, our inability to discover them, and the vain theories of Philosophers employed in this search, have made the word *cause*, and the related words, so ambiguous, and to signify so many things of different natures, that they have in a manner lost their proper and original meaning, and yet we have no other words to express it.

Every thing joined with the effect, and prior to it, is called its cause. An instrument, an occasion, a reason, a motive, an end, are called causes. And the related words *effect*, *agent*, *power*, are extended in the same vague manner.

13. Reid means Newton and those who had followed him in refraining fromframing hypotheses about the ultimate causal principles responsible for the laws of nature.

Were it not that the terms *cause* and *agent* have lost their proper meaning, in the crowd of meanings that have been given ‹289› them, we should immediately perceive a contradiction in the terms *necessary cause* and *necessary agent.* And although the loose meaning of those words is authorised by custom, the arbiter of language, and therefore cannot be censured, perhaps cannot always be avoided, yet we ought to be upon our guard, that we be not misled by it to conceive things to be the same which are essentially different.

To say that man is a free agent, is no more than to say, that in some instances he is truly an agent, and a cause, and is not merely acted upon as a passive instrument. On the contrary, to say that he acts from necessity, is to say that he does not act at all, that he is no agent, and that, for any thing we know, there is only one agent in the universe, who does every thing that is done, whether it be good or ill.

If this necessity be attributed even to the Deity, the consequence must be, that there neither is, nor can be, a cause at all; that nothing acts, but every thing is acted upon; nothing moves, but every thing is moved; all is passion without action; all instrument without an agent; and that every thing that is, or was, or shall be, has that necessary existence in its season, which we commonly consider as the prerogative of the First Cause.

This I take to be the genuine, and the most tenable system of necessity. It was the system of SPINOSA, though he was not the first that advanced it; for it is very ancient. And if this system be true, our reasoning to prove the existence of a first cause of every thing that begins to exist, must be given up as fallacious.

If it be evident to the human understanding, as I take it to be, That what begins to exist must have an efficient cause, which had power to give or not to give it existence; and if it be true ‹290› that effects well and wisely fitted for the best purposes, demonstrate intelligence, wisdom, and goodness, in the efficient cause, as well as power, the proof of a Deity from these principles is very easy and obvious to all men that can reason.

If, on the other hand, our belief that every thing that begins to exist has a cause, be got only by experience; and if, as Mr HUME maintains, the only notion of a cause be something prior to the effect which experience has shewn to be constantly conjoined with such an effect, I see not how, from these principles, it is possible to prove the existence of an intelligent cause of the universe.

Mr HUME seems to me to reason justly from his definition of a cause, when, in the person of an Epicurean, he maintains, that with regard to a

cause of the universe, we can conclude nothing; because it is a singular effect.[14] We have no experience that such effects are always conjoined with such a cause. Nay, the cause which we assign to this effect, is a cause which no man hath seen, nor can see, and therefore experience cannot inform us that it has ever been conjoined with any effect. He seems to me to reason justly from his definition of a cause, when he maintains, that *any thing* may be the cause of any thing; since priority and constant conjunction is all that can be conceived in the notion of a cause.[15]

Another zealous defender of the doctrine of necessity says, that ‘A cause cannot be defined to be any thing but *such previous circumstances as are constantly followed by a certain effect*, the *constancy* of the result making us conclude, that there must be a *sufficient reason*, in the nature of things, why it should be produced in those circumstances.’[16]

This seems to me to be Mr HUME’s definition of a cause in other words, and neither more nor less; but I am far from thinking that the Author of it will admit the consequences ‹291› which Mr HUME draws from it, however necessary they may appear to others.

CHAP. IV.

Of the Influence of Motives.[17]

THE modern advocates for the doctrine of necessity lay the stress of their cause upon the influence of motives.

‘Every deliberate action,’ they say, ‘must have a motive. When there is no motive on the other side, this motive must determine the agent: When there are contrary motives, the strongest must prevail: We reason from men’s motives to their actions, as we do from other causes to their effects: If man be a free agent, and be not governed by motives, all his actions must be mere caprice, rewards and punishments can have no effect, and such a being must be absolutely ungovernable.’[18]

14. See *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, 11.25: SBN 143–4.
15. See *Treatise*, 1.3.15.1: SBN 173.
16. Priestley, *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, p. 11.
17. In a brief paper, presumably for the Glasgow Literary Society, dated 1785, Reid says: ‘Since Mr Collins wrote his Essay on Liberty I think the Controversy has turned chiefly upon the Influence of Motives as we may see in the writings of Dr Clark of David Hume, of Lord Kames, of Priestly & of those that opposed them upon this point’ (3061/22, 1).
18. This is not a quotation but rather a paraphrase of the principal arguments of

In order therefore to understand distinctly, in what sense we ascribe moral liberty to man, it is necessary to understand what influence we allow to motives. To prevent misunderstanding, which has been very common upon this point, I offer the following observations:

1. I grant that all rational beings are influenced, and ought to be influenced by motives. But the influence of motives is of a very different nature from that of efficient causes. They are neither causes nor agents. They suppose an efficient cause, and can do nothing without it. We cannot, without absurdity, suppose a motive, either to act, or to be acted upon; it is equally ‹292› incapable of action and of passion; because it is not a thing that exists, but a thing that is conceived; it is what the schoolmen called an *ens rationis*.[19] Motives, therefore, may *influence* to action, but they do not act. They may be compared to advice, or exhortation, which leaves a man still at liberty. For in vain is advice given when there is not a power either to do, or to forbear what it recommends. In like manner, motives suppose liberty in the agent, otherwise they have no influence at all.

It is a law of nature, with respect to matter, That every motion, and change of motion, is proportional to the force impressed, and in the direction of that force. The scheme of necessity supposes a similar law to obtain in all the actions of intelligent beings; which, with little alteration, may be expressed thus: Every action, or change of action, in an intelligent being, is proportional to the force of motives impressed, and in the direction of that force.

The law of nature respecting matter, is grounded upon this principle: That matter is an inert, inactive substance, which does not act, but is acted upon; and the law of necessity must be grounded upon the supposition, That an intelligent being is an inert, inactive substance, which does not act, but is acted upon.

2. Rational beings, in proportion as they are wise and good, will act according to the best motives; and every rational being, who does otherwise, abuses his liberty. The most perfect being, in every thing where there is a right and a wrong, a better and a worse, always infallibly acts according to the best motives. This indeed is little else than an identical

defenders of necessity such as Collins, Hume, Kames, Edwards, Hartley and Priestley.

19. *Ens rationis* is a stock phrase in the ontology of the scholastics, meaning an entity that exists only in the mind, as contrasted with *ens reale*, an entity that exists independently of the mind.

proposition: For it is a contradiction to say, That a perfect being does what is wrong or unreasonable. But to say, that he does not act freely, because he always does what is best, is to say, That ‹293› the proper use of liberty destroys liberty, and that liberty consists only in its abuse.

The moral perfection of the Deity consists, not in having no power to do ill, otherwise, as Dr CLARK justly observes, there would be no ground to thank him for his goodness to us any more than for his eternity or immensity; but his moral perfection consists in this, that, when he has power to do every thing, a power which cannot be resisted, he exerts that power only in doing what is wisest and best.[20] To be subject to necessity is to have no power at all; for power and necessity are opposites. We grant, therefore, that motives have influence, similar to that of advice or persuasion; but this influence is perfectly consistent with liberty, and indeed supposes liberty.

3. Whether every deliberate action must have a motive, depends on the meaning we put upon the word *deliberate*. If, by a deliberate action, we mean an action wherein motives are weighed, which seems to be the original meaning of the word, surely there must be motives, and contrary motives, otherwise they could not be weighed. But if a deliberate action means only, as it commonly does, an action done by a cool and calm determination of the mind, with forethought and will, I believe there are innumerable such actions done without a motive.

This must be appealed to every man's consciousness. I do many trifling actions every day, in which, upon the most careful reflection, I am conscious of no motive; and to say that I may be influenced by a motive of which I am not conscious, is, in the first place, an arbitrary supposition without any evidence, and then, it is to say, that I may be convinced by an argument which never entered into my thought.

Cases frequently occur, in which an end, that is of some importance, may be answered equally well by any one of several ‹294› different means. In such cases, a man who intends the end finds not the least difficulty in taking one of these means, though he be firmly persuaded, that it has no title to be preferred to any of the others.

To say that this is a case that cannot happen, is to contradict the experience of mankind; for surely a man who has occasion to lay out a shilling, or a guinea, may have two hundred that are of equal value, both

20. See Samuel Clarke, *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, Section XII.

to the giver and to the receiver, any one of which will answer his purpose equally well. To say, that, if such a case should happen, the man could not execute his purpose, is still more ridiculous, though it have the authority of some of the schoolmen, who determined, that the ass, between two equal bundles of hay, would stand still till it died of hunger.

If a man could not act without a motive, he would have no power at all; for motives are not in our power; and he that has not power over a necessary mean, has no power over the end.

That an action, done without any motive, can neither have merit nor demerit, is much insisted on by the writers for necessity, and triumphantly, as if it were the very hinge of the controversy. I grant it to be a self-evident proposition, and I know no author that ever denied it.

How insignificant soever, in moral estimation, the actions may be which are done without any motive, they are of moment in the question concerning moral liberty. For, if there ever was any action of this kind, motives are not the sole causes of human actions. And if we have the power of acting without a motive, that power, joined to a weaker motive, may counterbalance a stronger.

‹295› 4. It can never be proved, That when there is a motive on one side only, that motive must determine the action.[21]

According to the laws of reasoning, the proof is incumbent on those who hold the affirmative; and I have never seen a shadow of argument, which does not take for granted the thing in question, to wit, that motives are the sole causes of actions.

Is there no such thing as wilfulness, caprice or obstinacy, among mankind? If there be not, it is wonderful that they should have names in all languages. If there be such things, a single motive, or even many motives, may be resisted.

5. When it is said, that of contrary motives the strongest always prevails, this can neither be affirmed nor denied with understanding, until we know distinctly what is meant by the strongest motive.

I do not find, that those who have advanced this as a self-evident axiom, have ever attempted to explain what they mean by the strongest motive, or have given any rule by which we may judge which of two motives is the strongest.

How shall we know whether the strongest motive always prevails, if

21. In the final manuscript Reid had crossed out ‘action’ and replaced it with ‘agent’ (1/II/4, 13).

we know not which is strongest? There must be some test by which their strength is to be tried, some balance in which they may be weighed, otherwise, to say that the strongest motive always prevails, is to speak without any meaning. We must therefore search for this test or balance, since they who have laid so much stress upon this axiom, have left us wholly in the dark as to its meaning. I grant, that when the contrary motives are of the same kind, and differ only in quantity, it may be easy to say which is the strongest. Thus a bribe of a thousand pounds is a stronger motive than a bribe of a hundred pounds. But when the motives are of different kinds, as, ‹296› money and fame, duty and worldly interest, health and strength, riches and honour, by what rule shall we judge which is the strongest motive?

Either we measure the strength of motives, merely by their prevalence, or by some other standard distinct from their prevalence.

If we measure their strength merely by their prevalence, and by the strongest motive mean only the motive that prevails, it will be true indeed that the strongest motive prevails; but the proposition will be identical, and mean no more than that the strongest motive is the strongest motive. From this surely no conclusion can be drawn.

If it should be said, That by the strength of a motive is not meant its prevalence, but the cause of its prevalence; that we measure the cause by the effect, and from the superiority of the effect conclude the superiority of the cause, as we conclude that to be the heaviest weight which bears down the scale: I answer, That, according to this explication of the axiom, it takes for granted that motives are the causes, and the sole causes of actions. Nothing is left to the agent, but to be acted upon by the motives, as the balance is by the weights. The axiom supposes, that the agent does not act, but is acted upon; and, from this supposition, it is concluded that he does not act. This is to reason in a circle, or rather it is not reasoning but begging the question.

Contrary motives may very properly be compared to advocates pleading the opposite sides of a cause at the bar. It would be very weak reasoning to say, that such an advocate is the most powerful pleader, because sentence was given on his side. The sentence is in the power of the judge, not of the advocate. It is equally weak reasoning, in proof of necessity, to say, such a motive pre ‹297›vailed, therefore it is the strongest; since the defenders of liberty maintain that the determination was made by the man, and not by the motive.

We are therefore brought to this issue, that unless some measure of the

strength of motives can be found distinct from their prevalence, it cannot be determined, whether the strongest motive always prevails or not. If such a measure can be found and applied, we may be able to judge of the truth of this maxim, but not otherwise.

Every thing that can be called a motive, is addressed either to the animal or to the rational part of our nature. Motives of the former kind are common to us with the brutes; those of the latter are peculiar to rational beings. We shall beg leave, for distinction's sake, to call the former, *animal* motives, and the latter, *rational*.

Hunger is a motive in a dog to eat; so is it in a man. According to the strength of the appetite, it gives a stronger or a weaker impulse to eat. And the same thing may be said of every other appetite and passion. Such animal motives give an impulse to the agent, to which he yields with ease; and, if the impulse be strong, it cannot be resisted without an effort which requires a greater or a less degree of self-command. Such motives are not addressed to the rational powers. Their influence is immediately upon the will. We feel their influence, and judge of their strength, by the conscious effort which is necessary to resist them.

When a man is acted upon by contrary motives of this kind, he finds it easy to yield to the strongest. They are like two forces pushing him in contrary directions. To yield to the strongest, he needs only to be passive. By exerting his own force, he may resist; but this requires an effort of which he is conscious. ‹298› The strength of motives of this kind is perceived, not by our judgment, but by our feeling; and that is the strongest of contrary motives, to which he can yield with ease, or which it requires an effort of self-command to resist; and this we may call the *animal test* of the strength of motives.

If it be asked, whether, in motives of this kind, the strongest always prevails? I would answer, That in brute-animals I believe it does. They do not appear to have any self-command; an appetite or passion in them is overcome only by a stronger contrary one. On this account, they are not accountable for their actions, nor can they be the subjects of law.

But in men who are able to exercise their rational powers, and have any degree of self-command, the strongest animal motive does not always prevail. The flesh does not always prevail against the spirit, though too often it does. And if men were necessarily determined by the strongest animal motive, they could no more be accountable, or capable of being governed by law, than brutes are.

Let us next consider rational motives, to which the name of *motive* is

more commonly and more properly given. Their influence is upon the judgment, by convincing us that such an action ought to be done, that it is our duty, or conducive to our real good, or to some end which we have determined to pursue.

They do not give a blind impulse to the will as animal motives do. They convince, but they do not impel, unless, as may often happen, they excite some passion of hope, or fear, or desire. Such passions may be excited by conviction, and may operate in its aid as other animal motives do. But there may be conviction without passion; and the conviction of what we ought to do, in order to some end which we have judged fit to be pursued, is what I call a *rational motive*.

‹299› Brutes, I think, cannot be influenced by such motives. They have not the conception of *ought* and *ought not*. Children acquire these conceptions as their rational powers advance; and they are found in all of ripe age, who have the human faculties.

If there be any competition between rational motives, it is evident, that the strongest, in the eye of reason, is that which it is most our duty and our real happiness to follow. Our duty and our real happiness are ends which are inseparable; and they are the ends which every man, endowed with reason, is conscious he ought to pursue in preference to all others. This we may call the *rational test* of the strength of motives. A motive which is the strongest, according to the animal test, may be, and very often is the weakest according to the rational.

The grand and the important competition of contrary motives is between the animal, on the one hand, and the rational on the other. This is the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, upon the event of which the character of men depends.

If it be asked, which of these is the strongest motive? The answer is, That the first is commonly strongest, when they are tried by the animal test. If it were not so, human life would be no state of trial. It would not be a warfare, nor would virtue require any effort of self-command. No man would have any temptation to do wrong. But, when we try the contrary motives by the rational test, it is evident, that the rational motive is always the strongest.

And now, I think, it appears, that the strongest motive, according to either of the tests I have mentioned, does not always prevail.

In every wise and virtuous action, the motive that prevails is ‹300› the strongest according to the rational test, but commonly the weakest according to the animal. In every foolish, and in every vicious action, the

motive that prevails is commonly the strongest according to the animal test, but always the weakest according to the rational.

6. It is true, that we reason from men's motives to their actions, and, in many cases, with great probability, but never with absolute certainty. And to infer from this, that men are necessarily determined by motives, is very weak reasoning.

For let us suppose, for a moment, that men have moral liberty, I would ask, what use may they be expected to make of this liberty? It may surely be expected, that, of the various actions within the sphere of their power, they will chuse what pleases them most for the present, or what appears to be most for their real, though distant good. When there is a competition between these motives, the foolish will prefer present gratification; the wise the greater and more distant good.

Now, is not this the very way in which we see men act? Is it not from the presumption that they act in this way, that we reason from their motives to their actions? Surely it is. Is it not weak reasoning, therefore, to argue, that men have not liberty, because they act in that very way in which they would act if they had liberty? It would surely be more like reasoning to draw the contrary conclusion from the same premises.

7. Nor is it better reasoning to conclude, that, if men are not necessarily determined by motives, all their actions must be capricious.

To resist the strongest animal motives when duty requires, is so far from being capricious, that it is, in the highest degree, wise and virtuous. And we hope this is often done by good men.

‹301› To act against rational motives, must always be foolish, vicious, or capricious. And, it cannot be denied, that there are too many such actions done. But is it reasonable to conclude, that because liberty may be abused by the foolish and the vicious, therefore it can never be put to its proper use, which is to act wisely and virtuously?

8. It is equally unreasonable to conclude, That if men are not necessarily determined by motives, rewards and punishments would have no effect. With wise men they will have their due effect; but not always with the foolish and the vicious.

Let us consider what effect rewards and punishments do really, and in fact, produce, and what may be inferred from that effect, upon each of the opposite systems of liberty and of necessity.

I take it for granted that, in fact, the best and wisest laws, both human and divine, are often transgressed, notwithstanding the rewards and punishments that are annexed to them. If any man should deny this fact,

I know not how to reason with him.

From this fact, it may be inferred with certainty, upon the supposition of necessity, That, in every instance of transgression, the motive of reward or punishment was not of sufficient strength to produce obedience to the law. This implies a fault in the lawgiver; but there can be no fault in the transgressor, who acts mechanically by the force of motives. We might as well impute a fault to the balance, when it does not raise a weight of two pounds by the force of one pound.

Upon the supposition of necessity, there can be neither reward nor punishment, in the proper sense, as those words imply good and ill desert. Reward and punishment are only tools employ ‹302›ed to produce a mechanical effect. When the effect is not produced, the tool must be unfit or wrong applied.

Upon the supposition of liberty, rewards and punishments will have a proper effect upon the wise and the good; but not so upon the foolish and the vicious, when opposed by their animal passions or bad habits; and this is just what we see to be the fact. Upon this supposition the transgression of the law implies no defect in the law, no fault in the lawgiver; the fault is solely in the transgressor. And it is upon this supposition only, that there can be either reward or punishment, in the proper sense of the words, because it is only on this supposition, that there can be good or ill desert.

CHAP. V.

Liberty consistent with Government.

WHEN it is said that liberty would make us absolutely ungovernable by GOD or man; to understand the strength of this conclusion, it is necessary to know distinctly what is meant by *government*. There are two kinds of government, very different in their nature. The one we may, for dis-tinction's sake, call *mechanical* government, the other *moral*. The first is the government of beings which have no active power, but are merely passive and acted upon, the second, of intelligent and active beings.

An instance of mechanical government may be that of a master or commander of a ship at sea. Supposing her skilfully built, and furnished with every thing proper for the destined voyage, to govern her properly for this purpose requires much art and attention: And, as every art has its rules, or laws, so has this. ‹303› But by whom are those laws to be

obeyed, or those rules observed? not by the ship, surely, for she is an inactive being, but by the governor. A sailor may say that she does not obey the rudder; and he has a distinct meaning when he says so, and is perfectly understood. But he means not obedience in the proper, but in a metaphorical sense: For, in the proper sense, the ship can no more obey the rudder, than she can give a command. Every motion, both of the ship and rudder, is exactly proportioned to the force impressed, and in the direction of that force. The ship never disobeys the laws of motion, even in the metaphorical sense; and they are the only laws she can be subject to.

The sailor, perhaps, curses her for not obeying the rudder; but this is not the voice of reason, but of passion, like that of the losing gamester, when he curses the dice. The ship is as innocent as the dice.

Whatever may happen during the voyage, whatever may be its issue, the ship, in the eye of reason, is neither an object of approbation nor of blame; because she does not act, but is acted upon. If the material, in any part, be faulty; Who put it to that use? If the form; Who made it? If the rules of navigation were not observed; Who transgressed them? If a storm occasioned any disaster, it was no more in the power of the ship than of the master.

Another instance to illustrate the nature of mechanical government may be, That of the man who makes and exhibits a puppet-show. The puppets, in all their diverting gesticulations, do not move, but are moved by an impulse secretly conveyed, which they cannot resist. If they do not play their parts properly, the fault is only in the maker or manager of the machinery. Too much or too little force was applied, or it was wrong directed. ‹304› No reasonable man imputes either praise or blame to the puppets, but solely to their maker or their governor.

If we suppose for a moment, the puppets to be endowed with understanding and will, but without any degree of active power, this will make no change in the nature of their government: For understanding and will, without some degree of active power, can produce no effect. They might, upon this supposition, be called *intelligent machines*; but they would be machines still as much subject to the laws of motion as inanimate matter, and therefore incapable of any other than mechanical government.

Let us next consider the nature of moral government. This is the government of persons who have reason and active power, and have laws prescribed to them for their conduct, by a legislator. Their obedience is obedience in the proper sense; it must therefore be their own act and deed,

and consequently they must have power to obey or disobey. To prescribe laws to them which they have not power to obey, or to require a service beyond their power, would be tyranny and injustice in the highest degree.

When the laws are equitable, and prescribed by just authority, they produce moral obligation in those that are subject to them, and dis-obedience is a crime deserving punishment. But if the obedience be impossible; if the transgression be necessary; it is self-evident, that there can be no moral obligation to what is impossible, that there can be no crime in yielding to necessity, and that there can be no justice in punishing a person for what it was not in his power to avoid. There [22] are first principles in morals, and, to every unprejudiced mind, as self-evident as the axioms of mathematics. The whole science of morals must stand or fall with them.

Having thus explained the nature both of mechanical and of ‹305› moral government, the only kinds of government I am able to conceive, it is easy to see how far liberty or necessity agrees with either.

On the one hand, I acknowledge that necessity agrees perfectly with mechanical government. This kind of government is most perfect when the governor is the sole agent; every thing done is the doing of the governor only. The praise of every thing well done is his solely; and his is the blame if there be any thing ill done, because he is the sole agent.

It is true that, in common language, praise or dispraise is often metaphorically given to the work; but, in propriety, it belongs solely to the author. Every workman understands this perfectly, and takes to himself very justly the praise or dispraise of his own work.

On the other hand, it is no less evident, that, on the supposition of necessity in the governed, there can be no moral government. There can be neither wisdom nor equity in prescribing laws that cannot be obeyed. There can be no moral obligation upon beings that have no active power. There can be no crime in not doing what it was impossible to do; nor can there be justice in punishing such omission.

If we apply these theoretical principles to the kinds of government which do actually exist, whether human or divine, we shall find that, among men, even mechanical government is imperfect.

Men do not make the matter they work upon. Its various kinds, and the qualities belonging to each kind, are the work of God. The laws of nature,

22. Reid's final manuscript has 'These'; so does the posthumous edition of 1803.

to which it is subject, are the work of GOD. The motions of the atmosphere and of the sea, the heat and cold of the air, the rain and wind, which are use ‹306›ful instruments in most human operations, are not in our power. So that, in all the mechanical productions of men, the work is more to be ascribed to GOD than to man.

Civil government among men is a species of moral government, but imperfect, as its lawgivers and its judges are. Human laws may be unwise or unjust; human judges may be partial or unskilful. But in all equitable civil governments, the maxims of moral government above mentioned, are acknowledged as rules which ought never to be violated. Indeed, the rules of justice are so evident to all men, that the most tyrannical governments profess to be guided by them, and endeavour to palliate what is contrary to them by the plea of necessity.

That a man cannot be under an obligation to what is impossible; that he cannot be criminal in yielding to necessity, nor justly punished for what he could not avoid, are maxims admitted, in all criminal courts, as fundamental rules of justice.

In opposition to this, it has been said by some of the most able defenders of necessity, That human laws require no more to constitute a crime, but that it be voluntary; whence it is inferred that the criminality consists in the determination of the will, whether that determination be free or necessary.[23] This, I think indeed, is the only possible plea by which criminality can be made consistent with necessity, and therefore it deserves to be considered.

I acknowledge that a crime must be voluntary; for, if it be not voluntary, it is no deed of the man, nor can be justly imputed to him; but it is no less necessary that the criminal have moral liberty. In men that are adult, and of a sound mind, this liberty is presumed. But in every case where it cannot be presumed, no criminality is imputed, even to voluntary actions.

‹307› This is evident from the following instances: *First*, The actions of brutes appear to be voluntary; yet they are never conceived to be criminal, though they may be noxious. *Secondly*, Children in nonage act voluntarily, but they are not chargeable with crimes. *Thirdly*, Madmen have both understanding and will, but they have not moral liberty, and therefore are not chargeable with crimes. *Fourthly*, Even in men that

23. See, e.g., Edwards, *Freedom of Will*, Part III; and Priestley, *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, Sections VI and VII.

are adult, and of a sound mind, a motive that is thought irresistible by any ordinary degree of self-command, such as the rack, or the dread of present death, either exculpates, or very much alleviates a voluntary action, which, in other circumstances, would be highly criminal; whence it is evident, that if the motive were absolutely irresistible, the excul - pation would be complete. So far is it from being true in itself, or agreeable to the common sense of mankind, that the criminality of an action depends solely upon its being voluntary.

The government of brutes, so far as they are subject to man, is a species of mechanical government, or something very like to it, and has no resemblance to moral government. As inanimate matter is governed by our knowledge of the qualities which GOD hath given to the various productions of nature, and our knowledge of the laws of nature which he hath established; so brute-animals are governed by our knowledge of the natural instincts, appetites, affections and passions, which GOD hath given them. By a skilful application of these springs of their actions, they may be trained to many habits useful to man. After all, we find that, from causes unknown to us, not only some species, but some individuals of the same species, are more tractable than others.

Children under age are governed much in the same way as the most sagacious brutes. The opening of their intellectual and moral powers, which may be much aided by proper instruc ‹308›tion and example, is that which makes them by degrees, capable of moral government.

Reason teaches us to ascribe to the Supreme Being a government of the inanimate and inactive part of his creation, analogous to that mechanical government which men exercise, but infinitely more perfect. This, I think, is what we call GOD's *natural* government of the universe. In this part of the divine government, whatever is done is GOD's doing. He is the sole cause, and the sole agent, whether he act immediately, or by instruments subordinate to him; and his will is always done: For instruments are not causes, they are not agents, though we sometimes improperly call them so.

It is therefore no less agreeable to reason, than to the language of holy writ, to impute to the Deity whatever is done in the natural world. When we say of any thing, that it is the work of nature, this is saying that it is the work of GOD, and can have no other meaning.

The natural world is a grand machine, contrived, made, and governed by the wisdom and power of the Almighty: And if there be in this natural world, beings that have life, intelligence, and will, without any degree of

active power, they can only be subject to the same kind of mechanical government. Their determinations, whether we call them good or ill, must be the actions of the Supreme Being, as much as the productions of the earth: For, life, intelligence, and will, without active power, can do nothing, and therefore nothing can justly be imputed to it.

This grand machine of the natural world, displays the power and wisdom of the artificer. But in it, there can be no display of moral attributes, which have a relation to moral conduct in his creatures, such as justice and equity in rewarding or punish ‹309›ing, the love of virtue and abhorrence of wickedness: For as every thing in it is GOD's doing, there can be no vice to be punished or abhorred, no virtue in his creatures to be rewarded.

According to the system of necessity, the whole universe of creatures is this natural world; and of every thing done in it, GOD is the sole agent. There can be no moral government, nor moral obligation. Laws, rewards, and punishments, are only mechanical engines, and the will of the lawgiver is obeyed as much when his laws are transgressed, as when they are observed. Such must be our notions of the government of the world, upon the supposition of necessity. It must be purely mechanical, and there can be no moral government upon that hypothesis.

Let us consider, on the other hand, what notion of the divine government we are naturally led into by the supposition of liberty.

They who adopt this system conceive, that in that small portion of the universe which falls under our view, as a great part has no active power, but moves, as it is moved, by necessity, and therefore must be subject to a mechanical government, so it has pleased the Almighty to bestow upon some of his creatures, particularly upon man, some degree of active power, and of reason, to direct him to the right use of his power.

What connection there may be, in the nature of things, between reason and active power, we know not. But we see evidently that, as reason without active power can do nothing, so active power without reason has no guide to direct it to any end.

These two conjoined make moral liberty, which, in how small a degree soever it is possessed, raises man to a superior rank ‹310› in the creation of GOD. He is not merely a tool in the hand of the master, but a servant, in the proper sense, who has a certain trust, and is accountable for the discharge of it. Within the sphere of his power, he has a subordinate dominion or government, and therefore may be said to be made after the image of GOD, the Supreme Governor. But as his dominion is sub -

ordinate, he is under a moral obligation to make a right use of it, as far as the reason which GOD hath given him can direct him. When he does so, he is a just object of moral approbation; and no less an object of disapprobation and just punishment when he abuses the power with which he is entrusted. And he must finally render an account of the talent committed to him, to the supreme Governor and righteous Judge.

This is the moral government of GOD, which, far from being inconsistent with liberty, supposes liberty in those that are subject to it, and can extend no farther than that liberty extends; for accountableness can no more agree with necessity than light with darkness.

It ought likewise to be observed, that as active power in man, and in every created being, is the gift of GOD, it depends entirely on his pleasure for its existence, its degree and its continuance, and therefore can do nothing which he does not see fit to permit.

Our power to act does not exempt us from being acted upon, and restrained or compelled by a superior power; and the power of GOD is always superior to that of man.

It would be great folly and presumption in us to pretend to know all the ways in which the government of the Supreme Being is carried on, and his purposes accomplished by men, acting freely, and having different or opposite purposes in their view. For, as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his thoughts above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways.[24]

‹311› That a man may have great influence upon the voluntary determinations of other men, by means of education, example and persuasion, is a fact which must be granted, whether we adopt the system of liberty or necessity. How far such determinations ought to be imputed to the person who applied those means, how far to the person influenced by them, we know not, but GOD knows, and will judge righteously.

But what I would here observe is, That if a man of superior talents may have so great influence over the actions of his fellow-creatures, without taking away their liberty, it is surely reasonable to allow a much greater influence of the same kind to him who made man. Nor can it ever be proved, that the wisdom and power of the Almighty are insufficient for governing free agents, so as to answer his purposes.

He who made man may have ways of governing his determinations, consistent with moral liberty, of which we have no conception. And

24. Reid is quoting from Isaiah 57:9.

he who gave this liberty freely, may lay any restraint upon it that is necessary for answering his wise and benevolent purposes. The justice of his government requires, that his creatures should be accountable only for what they have received, and not for what was never entrusted to them. And we are sure that the Judge of all the earth will do what is right.

Thus, I think, it appears, that, upon the supposition of necessity, there can be no moral government of the universe. Its government must be perfectly mechanical, and every thing done in it, whether good or ill, must be GOD's doing; and that, upon the supposition of liberty, there may be a perfect moral government of the universe, consistent with his accomplishing all his purposes, in its creation and government.

The arguments to prove that man is endowed with moral liberty, which have the greatest weight with me, are three: *First*, ‹312› Because he has a natural conviction or belief, that, in many cases, he acts freely; *secondly*, Because he is accountable; and, *thirdly*, Because he is able to prosecute an end by a long series of means adapted to it.

CHAP. VI.

First Argument.

WE have, by our constitution, a natural conviction or belief that we act freely: A conviction so early, so universal and so necessary in most of our rational operations, that it must be the result of our constitution, and the work of him that made us.

Some of the most strenuous advocates for the doctrine of necessity acknowledge that it is impossible to act upon it. They say that we have a natural sense or conviction that we act freely, but that this is a fallacious sense.[25]

This doctrine is dishonourable to our Maker, and lays a foundation for

25. Hume had dismissed 'a *false sensation or experience* even of the liberty of indifference; which is regarded as an argument for its real existence' (*Treatise*, 2.3.2.2: SBN 408). But Reid surely also means Kames, who, in the first edition of his *Essays on the Principles of Morality of Natural Religion* (1751) had proposed that, though truth is on the side of the doctrine of necessity, we are by nature, and as a matter of providential design, possessed of a 'deceitful' sense of liberty (see Essay III, 'Liberty and Necessity'). In both the second and third editions of the *Essays* Kames made significant changes to his means of reconciling liberty with necessity. All the important alterations are recorded in Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, ed. Moran.

universal scepticism. It supposes the Author of our being to have given us one faculty on purpose to deceive us, and another by which we may detect the fallacy, and find that he imposed upon us.

If any one of our natural faculties be fallacious, there can be no reason to trust to any of them; for he that made one made all.

The genuine dictate of our natural faculties is the voice of God, no less than what he reveals from heaven; and to say that it is fallacious is to impute a lie to the God of truth.

‹313› If candour and veracity be not an essential part of moral excellence, there is no such thing as moral excellence, nor any reason to rely on the declarations and promises of the Almighty. A man may be tempted to lie, but not without being conscious of guilt and of meanness. Shall we impute to the Almighty what we cannot impute to a man without a heinous affront?

Passing this opinion, therefore, as shocking to an ingenuous mind, and, in its consequences, subversive of all religion, all morals and all knowledge, let us proceed to consider the evidence of our having a natural conviction that we have some degree of active power.

The very conception or idea of active power must be derived from something in our own constitution. It is impossible to account for it otherwise. We see events, but we see not the power that produces them. We perceive one event to follow another, but we perceive not the chain that binds them together. The notion of power and causation, therefore, cannot be got from external objects.

Yet the notion of causes, and the belief that every event must have a cause which had power to produce it, is found in every human mind so firmly established, that it cannot be rooted out.

This notion and this belief must have its origin from something in our constitution; and that it is natural to man, appears from the following observations.

1. We are conscious of many voluntary exertions, some easy, others more difficult, some requiring a great effort. These are exertions of power. And though a man may be unconscious of his power when he does not exert it, he must have both the con ‹314›ception and the belief of it, when he knowingly and willingly exerts it, with intention to produce some effect.

2. Deliberation about an action of moment, whether we shall do it or not, implies a conviction that it is in our power. To deliberate about an end, we must be convinced that the means are in our power; and to

deliberate about the means, we must be convinced that we have power to chuse the most proper.

3. Suppose our deliberation brought to an issue, and that we resolve to do what appeared proper, Can we form such a resolution or purpose, without any conviction of power to execute it? No; it is impossible. A man cannot resolve to lay out a sum of money, which he neither has, nor hopes ever to have.

4. Again, when I plight my faith in any promise or contract, I must believe that I shall have power to perform what I promise. Without this persuasion, a promise would be downright fraud.

There is a condition implied in every promise, *if we live*, and *if* GOD *continue with us the power which he hath given us*Our conviction, therefore, of this power derogates not in the least from our dependence upon GOD. The rudest savage is taught by nature to admit this condition in all promises, whether it be expressed or not. For it is a dictate of common sense, that we can be under no obligation to do what it is impossible for us to do.

If we act upon the system of necessity, there must be another condition implied in all deliberation, in every resolution, and in every promise; and that is, *if we shall be willing* . But the will not being in our power, we cannot engage for it.

If this condition be understood, as it must be understood if we ‹315› act upon the system of necessity, there can be no deliberation, or resolution, nor any obligation in a promise. A man might as well deliberate, resolve and promise, upon the actions of other men as upon his own.

It is no less evident, that we have a conviction of power in other men, when we advise, or persuade, or command, or conceive them to be under obligation by their promises.

5. Is it possible for any man to blame himself for yielding to necessity? Then he may blame himself for dying, or for being a man. Blame supposes a wrong use of power; and when a man does as well as it was possible for him to do, wherein is he to be blamed? Therefore all con - viction of wrong conduct, all remorse and self-condemnation, imply a conviction of our power to have done better. Take away this conviction, and there may be a sense of misery, or a dread of evil to come, but there can be no sense of guilt or resolution to do better.

Many who hold the doctrine of necessity disown these consequences of it, and think to evade them. To such they ought not to be imputed; but their inseparable connection with that doctrine appears self-evident: And

therefore some late patrons of it have had the boldness to avow them. 'They cannot accuse themselves of having done any thing wrong in the ultimate sense of the words. In a strict sense, they have nothing to do with repentance, confession and pardon, these being adapted to a fallacious view of things.'[26]

Those who can adopt these sentiments, may indeed celebrate, with high encomiums, *the great and glorious doctrine of necessity*.[27] It restores them, in their own conceit, to the state of innocence. It delivers them from all the pangs of guilt and remorse, and from all fear about their future conduct, though not about their fate. They may be as secure that they shall do no ‹316›thing wrong, as those who have finished their course. A doctrine so flattering to the mind of a sinner is very apt to give strength to weak arguments.

After all, it is acknowledged by those who boast of this glorious doctrine, 'That every man, let him use what efforts he can, will necessarily feel the sentiments of shame, remorse, and repentance, and, oppressed with a sense of guilt, will have recourse to that mercy of which he stands in need.'[28]

The meaning of this seems to me to be, That although the doctrine of necessity be supported by invincible arguments, and though it be the most consolatory doctrine in the world; yet no man, in his most serious moments, when he sits himself before the throne of his Maker, can possibly believe it, but must then necessarily lay aside this glorious doctrine, and all its flattering consequences, and return to the humiliating conviction of his having made a bad use of the power which GOD had given him.

If the belief of our having active power be necessarily implied in those rational operations we have mentioned, it must be coeval with our reason; it must be as universal among men, and as necessary in the conduct of life, as those operations are.

We cannot recollect by memory when it began. It cannot be a prejudice of education, or of false philosophy. It must be a part of our constitution, or the necessary result of our constitution, and therefore the work of GOD.

26. This passage is from a chapter added to the second edition of Priestley's *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, p. 147.
27. In the Preface to *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated* Priestley wrote of 'the great and glorious, but unpopular doctrine of *Philosophical Necessity*' (p. xxxi).
28. Priestley, *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, second edition, p. 148.

It resembles, in this respect, our belief of the existence of a material world; our belief that those we converse with are living and intelligent beings; our belief that those things did really happen which we distinctly remember, and our belief that we continue the same identical persons.

‹317› We find difficulty in accounting for our belief of these things; and some Philosophers think, that they have discovered good reasons for throwing it off.[29] But it sticks fast, and the greatest sceptic finds, that he must yield to it in his practice, while he wages war with it in speculation.

If it be objected to this argument, That the belief of our acting freely cannot be implied in the operations we have mentioned, because those operations are performed by them who believe, that we are, in all our actions, governed by necessity. The answer to this objection is, That men in their practice may be governed by a belief which in speculation they reject.

However strange and unaccountable this may appear, there are many well known instances of it.

I knew a man who was as much convinced as any man of the folly of a popular belief of apparitions in the dark, yet he could not sleep in a room alone, nor go alone into a room in the dark. Can it be said, that his fear did not imply a belief of danger? This is impossible. Yet his philosophy convinced him, that he was in no more danger in the dark when alone, than with company.

Here an unreasonable belief, which was merely a prejudice of the nursery, stuck so fast as to govern his conduct, in opposition to his speculative belief as a Philosopher and a man of sense.[30]

There are few persons who can look down from the battlement of a very high tower without fear, while their reason convinces them that they are in no more danger than when standing upon the ground.

There have been persons who professed to believe that there ‹318› is no distinction between virtue and vice, yet in their practice they resented injuries, and esteemed noble and virtuous actions.

There have been sceptics who professed to disbelieve their senses, and every human faculty; but no sceptic was ever known, who did not, in practice, pay a regard to his senses and to his other faculties.

There are some points of belief so necessary, that, without them, a man

29. Reid means Hume, and probably also Berkeley.
30. Reid surely alludes to Priestley's self-confessed fear of the dark: see Priestley, *Examination of Reid, Beattie and Oswald*, p. 68.

would not be the being which GOD made him. These may be opposed in speculation, but it is impossible to root them out. In a speculative hour they seem to vanish, but in practice they resume their authority. This seems to be the case of those who hold the doctrine of necessity, and yet act as if they were free.

This natural conviction of some degree of power in ourselves and in other men, respects voluntary actions only. For as all our power is directed by our will, we can form no conception of power, properly so called, that is not under the direction of will. And therefore our exertions, our deliberations, our purposes, our promises, are only in things that depend upon our will. Our advices, exhortations and commands, are only in things that depend upon the will of those to whom they are addressed. We impute no guilt to ourselves, nor to others, in things where the will is not concerned.

But it deserves our notice, that we do not conceive every thing, without exception, to be in a man's power which depends upon his will. There are many exceptions to this general rule. The most obvious of these I shall mention, because they both serve to illustrate the rule, and are of importance in the question concerning the liberty of man.

In the rage of madness, men are absolutely deprived of the ‹319› power of self-government. They act voluntarily, but their will is driven as by a tempest, which, in lucid intervals, they resolve to oppose with all their might, but are overcome when the fit of madness returns.

Idiots are like men walking in the dark, who cannot be said to have the power of chusing their way, because they cannot distinguish the good road from the bad. Having no light in their understanding, they must either sit still, or be carried on by some blind impulse.

Between the darkness of infancy, which is equal to that of idiots, and the maturity of reason, there is a long twilight, which, by insensible degrees, advances to the perfect day.

In this period of his life, man has but little of the power of self-government. His actions, by nature, as well as by the laws of society, are in the power of others more than in his own. His folly and indiscretion, his levity and inconstancy, are considered as the fault of youth, rather than of the man. We consider him as half a man and half a child, and expect that each by turns should play its part. He would be thought a severe and unequitable censor of manners, who required the same cool deliberation, the same steady conduct, and the same mastery over himself in a boy of thirteen, as in a man of thirty.

It is an old adage, That violent anger is a short fit of madness.[31] If this be literally true in any case, a man, in such a fit of passion, cannot be said to have the command of himself. If real madness could be proved, it must have the effect of madness while it lasts, whether it be for an hour or for life. But the madness of a short fit of passion, if it be really madness, is incapable of proof; and therefore is not admitted in human tribunals as an exculpation. And, I believe, there is no case where a man can satisfy his own mind that his passion, both in its be‹320›ginning and in its progress, was irresistible. The Searcher of hearts [32] alone knows infallibly what allowance is due in cases of this kind.

But a violent passion, though it may not be irresistible, is difficult to be resisted: And a man, surely, has not the same power over himself in passion, as when he is cool. On this account it is allowed by all men to alleviate, when it cannot exculpate; and has its weight in criminal courts, as well as in private judgment.

It ought likewise to be observed, That he who has accustomed himself to restrain his passions, enlarges by habit his power over them, and consequently over himself. When we consider that a Canadian savage can acquire the power of defying death, in its most dreadful forms, and of braving the most exquisite torment for many long hours, without losing the command of himself; we may learn from this, that, in the constitution of human nature, there is ample scope for the enlargement of that power of self-command, without which there can be no virtue nor magnanimity.

There are cases, however, in which a man's voluntary actions are thought to be very little, if at all, in his power, on account of the violence of the motive that impels him. The magnanimity of a hero, or of a martyr, is not expected in every man, and on all occasions.

If a man trusted, by the government, with a secret, which it is high treason to disclose, be prevailed upon by a bribe, we have no mercy for him, and hardly allow the greatest bribe to be any alleviation of his crime.

But, on the other hand, if the secret be extorted by the rack, or by the dread of present death, we pity him more than we ‹321› blame him, and would think it severe and unequitable to condemn him as a traitor.

What is the reason that all men agree in condemning this man as a traitor in the first case, and in the last, either exculpate him, or think his fault greatly alleviated? If he acted necessarily in both cases, compelled

31. '*Ira furor brevis est*': Horace, *Epistles*, Book 1, Epistle 2, l. 62.
32. God is referred to as 'he that searcheth the hearts' at Romans 8:27.

by an irresistible motive, I can see no reason why we should not pass the same judgment on both.

But the reason of these different judgments is evidently this, That the love of money, and of what is called a man's interest, is a cool motive, which leaves to a man the entire power over himself: But the torment of the rack, or the dread of present death, are so violent motives, that men, who have not uncommon strength of mind, are not masters of themselves in such a situation, and therefore what they do is not imputed, or is thought less criminal.

If a man resist such motives, we admire his fortitude, and think his conduct heroical rather than human. If he yields, we impute it to human frailty, and think him rather to be pitied than severely censured.

Inveterate habits are acknowledged to diminish very considerably the power a man has over himself. Although we may think him highly blameable in acquiring them, yet, when they are confirmed to a certain degree, we consider him as no longer master of himself, and hardly reclaimable without a miracle.

Thus we see, that the power which we are led, by common sense, to ascribe to man, respects his voluntary actions only, and that it has various limitations even with regard to them. Some actions that depend upon our will are easy, others very difficult, and some, perhaps, beyond our power. In different men, the ‹322› power of self-government is different, and in the same man at different times. It may be diminished, or perhaps lost, by bad habits; it may be greatly increased by good habits.

These are facts attested by experience, and supported by the common judgment of mankind. Upon the system of liberty they are perfectly intelligible; but, I think, irreconcileable to that of necessity; for, How can there be an easy and a difficult in actions equally subject to necessity? or, How can power be greater or less, increased or diminished, in those who have no power?

This natural conviction of our acting freely, which is acknowledged by many who hold the doctrine of necessity, ought to throw the whole burden of proof upon that side: For, by this, the side of liberty has what lawyers call a *jus quæsitum*, or a right of ancient possession, which ought to stand good till it be overturned.[33] If it cannot be proved that we always

33. A *ius quæsitum* is a general term for an acquired right in Scottish law. Since Reid opens the present chapter by asserting that the belief in free agency is naturally given, the acquired right is presumably that of not having to give evidence to prove this belief, the giving of evidence being a social act

act from necessity, there is no need of arguments on the other side to convince us that we are free agents.

To illustrate this by a similar case: If a Philosopher would persuade me, that my fellow-men with whom I converse, are not thinking intelligent beings, but mere machines, though I might be at a loss to find arguments against this strange opinion, I should think it reasonable to hold the belief which nature gave me before I was capable of weighing evidence, until convincing proof is brought against it.

‹323›

CHAP. VII.

Second Argument.

THAT there is a real and essential distinction between right and wrong conduct, between just and unjust; that the most perfect moral rectitude is to be ascribed to the Deity; that man is a moral and accountable being, capable of acting right and wrong, and answerable for his conduct to him who made him, and assigned him a part to act upon the stage of life; are principles proclaimed by every man's conscience; principles upon which the systems of morality and natural religion, as well as the system of revelation, are grounded, and which have been generally acknowledged by those who hold contrary opinions on the subject of human liberty. I shall therefore here take them for granted.

These principles afford an obvious, and, I think, an invincible argument, that man is endowed with moral liberty.

Two things are implied in the notion of a moral and accountable being; understanding and active power.

First, He must understand the law to which he is bound, and his obligation to obey it. Moral obedience must be voluntary, and must regard the authority of the law. I may command my horse to eat when he hungers, and drink when he thirsts. He does so; but his doing it is no moral obedience. He does not understand my command, and therefore can have no will to obey it. He has not the conception of moral obligation, and therefore cannot act from the conviction of it. In eating and drinking he is moved by his own appetite only, and not by my authority.

dependent upon linguistic usage ('ancient possession') which the adversaries, on Reid's argument, themselves adopt.

‹324› Brute-animals are incapable of moral obligation, because they have not the degree of understanding which it implies. They have not the conception of a rule of conduct, and of obligation to obey it, and therefore, though they may be noxious, they cannot be criminal.

Man, by his rational nature, is capable both of understanding the law that is prescribed to him, and of perceiving its obligation. He knows what it is to be just and honest, to injure no man, and to obey his Maker. From his constitution, he has an immediate conviction of his obligation to these things. He has the approbation of his conscience when he acts by these rules; and he is conscious of guilt and demerit when he transgresses them. And, without this knowledge of his duty and his obligation, he would not be a moral and accountable being.

Secondly, Another thing implied in the notion of a moral and accountable being, is power to do what he is accountable for.

That no man can be under a moral obligation to do what it is impossible for him to do, or to forbear what it is impossible for him to forbear, is an axiom as self-evident as any in mathematics. It cannot be contradicted, without overturning all notion of moral obligation; nor can there be any exception to it, when it is rightly understood.

Some moralists have mentioned what they conceive to be an exception to this maxim. The exception is this. When a man, by his own fault, has disabled himself from doing his duty, his obligation, they say, remains, though he is now unable to discharge it. Thus, if a man by sumptuous living has become bankrupt, his inability to pay his debt does not take away his obligation.[34]

‹325› To judge whether, in this and similar cases, there be any exception to the axiom above mentioned, they must be stated accurately.

No doubt a man is highly criminal in living above his fortune, and his crime is greatly aggravated by the circumstance of his being thereby unable to pay his just debt. Let us suppose, therefore, that he is punished for this crime as much as it deserves; that his goods are fairly distributed among his creditors, and that one half remains unpaid: Let us suppose also, that he adds no new crime to what is past, that he becomes a new man, and not only supports himself by honest industry, but does all in his power to pay what he still owes.

34. Reid is referring to Hutcheson, *System*, vol. I, pp. 228–9, where the same example is used. Hutcheson followed Pufendorf, *Law of Natur*e I.v.5 and *Dut*y, I.i.17.

I would now ask, Is he further punishable, and really guilty for not paying more than he is able? Let every man consult his conscience, and say whether he can blame this man for not doing more than he is able to do. His guilt before his bankruptcy is out of the question, as he has received the punishment due for it. But that his subsequent conduct is unblameable, every man must allow; and that, in his present state, he is accountable for no more than he is able to do. His obligation is not cancelled, it returns with his ability, and can go no farther.

Suppose a sailor, employed in the navy of his country, and longing for the ease of a public hospital as an invalid, to cut off his fingers, so as to disable him from doing the duty of a sailor; he is guilty of a great crime; but, after he has been punished according to the demerit of his crime, will his captain insist that he shall still do the duty of a sailor? Will he command him to go aloft when it is impossible for him to do it, and punish him as guilty of disobedience? Surely if there be any such thing as justice and injustice, this would be unjust and wanton cruelty.

‹326› Suppose a servant, through negligence and inattention, mistakes the orders given him by his master, and, from this mistake, does what he was ordered not to do. It is commonly said that culpable ignorance does not excuse a fault: This decision is inaccurate, because it does not shew where the fault lies: The fault was solely in that inattention, or negligence, which was the occasion of his mistake: There was no subsequent fault.

This becomes evident, when we vary the case so far as to suppose, that he was unavoidably led into the mistake without any fault on his part. His mistake is now invincible, and, in the opinion of all moralists, takes away all blame; yet this new case supposes no change, but in the cause of his mistake. His subsequent conduct was the same in both cases. The fault therefore lay solely in the negligence and inattention which was the cause of his mistake.

The axiom, That invincible ignorance takes away all blame, is only a particular case of the general axiom, That there can be no moral obligation to what is impossible; the former is grounded upon the latter, and can have no other foundation.

I shall put only one case more. Suppose that a man, by excess and intemperance, has entirely destroyed his rational faculties, so as to have become perfectly mad or idiotical; suppose him forewarned of his danger, and that, though he foresaw that this must be the consequence, he went on still in his criminal indulgence. A greater crime can hardly be supposed, or more deserving of severe punishment. Suppose him

punished as he deserves; will it be said, that the duty of a man is incumbent upon him now, when he has not the faculties of a man, or that he incurs new guilt when he is not a moral agent? Surely we may as well suppose a plant, or a clod of earth, to be a subject of moral duty.

‹327› The decisions I have given of these cases, are grounded upon the fundamental principles of morals, the most immediate dictates of conscience. If these principles are given up, all moral reasoning is at an end, and no distinction is left between what is just and what is unjust. And it is evident, that none of these cases furnishes any exception to the axiom above mentioned. No moral obligation can be consistent with impossibility in the performance.

Active power, therefore, is necessarily implied in the very notion of a moral accountable being. And if man be such a being, he must have a degree of active power proportioned to the account he is to make. He may have a model of perfection set before him which he is unable to reach; but, if he does to the utmost of his power, this is all he can be answerable for. To incur guilt, by not going beyond his power, is impossible.

What was said, in the first argument, of the limitation of our power, adds much strength to the present argument. A man's power, it was observed, extends only to his voluntary actions, and has many limitations, even with respect to them.

His accountableness has the same extent and the same limitations.

In the rage of madness he has no power over himself, neither is he accountable, or capable of moral obligation. In ripe age, man is accountable in a greater degree than in non-age, because his power over himself is greater. Violent passions, and violent motives alleviate what is done through their influence, in the same proportion as they diminish the power of resistance.

There is, therefore, a perfect correspondence between power, on the one hand, and moral obligation and accountableness, on the other. They not only correspond in general, as they respect ‹328› voluntary actions only, but every limitation of the first produces a corresponding limitation of the two last. This, indeed, amounts to nothing more than that maxim of common sense, confirmed by Divine authority, That to whom much is given, of him much will be required.[35]

The sum of this argument is, That a certain degree of active power is the talent which GOD hath given to every rational accountable creature,

35. Reid alludes to Luke 12:48.

and of which he will require an account. If man had no power, he would have nothing to account for. All wise and all foolish conduct, all virtue and vice, consist in the right use or in the abuse of that power which GOD hath given us. If man had no power, he could neither be wise nor foolish, virtuous nor vicious.

If we adopt the system of necessity, the terms *moral obligation* and *accountableness*, *praise* and *blame*, *merit* and *demerit*, *justice* and *injustice*, *reward* and *punishment*, *wisdom* and *folly*, *virtue* and *vice*, ought to be disused, or to have new meanings given to them when they are used in religion, in morals, or in civil government; for upon that system, there can be no such things as they have been always used to signify.

‹329›

CHAP. VIII.

Third Argument.

THAT man has power over his own actions and volitions appears, because he is capable of carrying on, wisely and prudently, a system of conduct, which he has before conceived in his mind, and resolved to prosecute.

I take it for granted, that, among the various characters of men, there have been some, who, after they came to years of understanding, deliberately laid down a plan of conduct, which they resolved to pursue through life; and that of these, some have steadily pursued the end they had in view, by the proper means.

It is of no consequence in this argument, whether one has made the best choice of his main end or not; whether his end be riches, or power, or fame, or the approbation of his Maker. I suppose only, that he has prudently and steadily pursued it; that, in a long course of deliberate actions, he has taken the means that appeared most conducive to his end, and avoided whatever might cross it.

That such conduct in a man demonstrates a certain degree of wisdom and understanding, no man ever doubted; and, I say, it demonstrates, with equal force, a certain degree of power over his voluntary determinations.

This will appear evident, if we consider, that understanding without power may project, but can execute nothing. A regular plan of conduct, as it cannot be contrived without understanding, so it cannot be carried into execution without power; and, ‹330› therefore, the execution, as an

effect, demonstrates, with equal force, both power and understanding in the cause. Every indication of wisdom, taken from the effect, is equally an indication of power to execute what wisdom planned. And, if we have any evidence, that the wisdom which formed the plan is in the man, we have the very same evidence, that the power which executed it is in him also.

In this argument, we reason from the same principles, as in demonstrating the being and perfections of the First Cause of all things.

The effects we observe in the course of nature require a cause. Effects wisely adapted to an end, require a wise cause. Every indication of the wisdom of the Creator is equally an indication of his power. His wisdom appears only in the works done by his power; for wisdom without power may speculate, but it cannot act; it may plan, but it cannot execute its plans.

The same reasoning we apply to the works of men. In a stately palace we see the wisdom of the architect. His wisdom contrived it, and wisdom could do no more. The execution required, both a distinct conception of the plan, and power to operate according to that plan.

Let us apply these principles to the supposition we have made, That a man, in a long course of conduct, has determined and acted prudently in the prosecution of a certain end. If the man had both the wisdom to plan this course of conduct, and that power over his own actions that was necessary to carry it into execution, he is a free agent, and used his liberty, in this instance, with understanding.

But if all his particular determinations, which concurred in the execution of this plan were produced, not by himself, but‹331› by some cause acting necessarily upon him, then there is no evidence left that he contrived this plan, or that he ever spent a thought about it.

The cause that directed all these determinations so wisely, whatever it was, must be a wise and intelligent cause; it must have understood the plan, and have intended the execution of it.

If it be said, that all this course of determinations was produced by motives; motives surely have not understanding to conceive a plan, and intend its execution. We must therefore go back beyond motives to some intelligent being who had the power of arranging those motives, and applying them, in their proper order and season, so as to bring about the end.

This intelligent being must have understood the plan, and intended to execute it. If this be so, as the man had no hand in the execution, we have

not any evidence left, that he had any hand in the contrivance, or even that he is a thinking being.

If we can believe, that an extensive series of means may conspire to promote an end without a cause that intended the end, and had power to chuse and apply those means for the purpose, we may as well believe, that this world was made by a fortuitous concourse of atoms, without an intelligent and powerful cause.

If a lucky concourse of motives could produce the conduct of an ALEXANDER or a JULIUS CÆSAR, no reason can be given why a lucky concourse of atoms might not produce the planetary system.

If, therefore, wise conduct in a man demonstrates that he has some degree of wisdom, it demonstrates, with equal force and ‹332› evidence, that he has some degree of power over his own determinations.

All the reason we can assign for believing that our fellow-men think and reason, is grounded upon their actions and speeches. If they are not the cause of these, there is no reason left to conclude that they think and reason.

DES CARTES thought that the human body is merely a mechanical engine, and that all its motions and actions are produced by mechanism. If such a machine could be made to speak and to act rationally, we might indeed conclude with certainty, that the maker of it had both reason and active power; but if we once knew, that all the motions of the machine were purely mechanical, we should have no reason to conclude that the man had reason or thought.

The conclusion of this argument is, That, if the actions and speeches of other men give us sufficient evidence that they are reasonable beings, they give us the same evidence, and the same degree of evidence, that they are free agents.

There is another conclusion that may be drawn from this reasoning, which it is proper to mention.

Suppose a fatalist, rather than give up the scheme of necessity, should acknowledge that he has no evidence that there is thought and reason in any of his fellow-men, and that they may be mechanical engines for all that he knows; he will be forced to acknowledge, that there must be active power, as well as understanding, in the maker of those engines, and that the first cause is a free agent. We have the same reason to believe this, as to believe his existence and his wisdom. And, if the Deity acts freely, every argument brought to prove that freedom of action is impossible, must fall to the ground.

‹333› The First Cause gives us evidence of his power by every effect that gives us evidence of his wisdom. And, if he is pleased to communicate to the work of his hands some degree of his wisdom, no reason can be assigned why he may not communicate some degree of his power, as the talent which wisdom is to employ.

That the first motion, or the first effect, whatever it be, cannot be produced necessarily, and, consequently, that the First Cause must be a free agent, has been demonstrated so clearly and unanswerably by Dr CLARKE, both in his Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of GOD, and in the end of his Remarks on COLLIN's Philosophical Enquiry concerning Human Liberty,[36] that I can add nothing to what he has said; nor have I found any objection made to his reasoning, by any of the defenders of necessity.

CHAP. IX.

Of Arguments for Necessity.

SOME of the arguments that have been offered for necessity were already considered in this essay.

It has been said, That human liberty respects only the actions that are subsequent to volition; and that power over the determinations of the will is inconceivable, and involves a contradiction. This argument was considered in the first chapter.

It has been said, That liberty is inconsistent with the influence of motives, that it would make human actions capricious, and man ungovernable by GOD or man. These arguments were considered in the fourth and fifth chapters.

‹334› I am now to make some remarks upon other arguments that have been urged in this cause. They may, I think, be reduced to three classes. They are intended to prove, either that liberty of determination is impossible, or that it would be hurtful, or that, in fact, man has no such liberty.

To prove that liberty of determination is impossible, it has been said, That there must be a sufficient reason for every thing. *For every*

36. Clarke, *Demonstration*, Section IX; and *Remarks upon a Book, Entitled, A Philosophical Enquiry concerning Human Liberty*, pp. 43ff.

existence, for every event, for every truth, there must be a sufficient reason.

The famous German Philosopher LEIBNITZ boasted much of having first applied this principle to philosophy, and of having, by that means, changed metaphysics from being a play of unmeaning words, to be a rational and demonstrative science. [37] On this account it deserves to be considered.

A very obvious objection to this principle was, That two or more means may be equally fit for the same end; and that, in such a case, there may be sufficient reason for taking one of the number, though there be no reason for preferring one to another, of means equally fit.

To obviate this objection LEIBNITZ maintained, that the case supposed could not happen; or, if it did, that none of the means could be used, for want of a sufficient reason to prefer one to the rest. Therefore he determined, with some of the schoolmen, That if an ass could be placed between two bundles of hay, or two fields of grass equally inviting, the poor beast would certainly stand still and starve; but the case, he says, could not happen without a miracle.

When it was objected to this principle, That there could be no reason but the will of GOD why the material world was placed in one part of unlimited space rather than another, or ‹335› created at one point of unlimited duration rather than another, or why the planets should move from west to east, rather than in a contrary direction; these objections LEIBNITZ obviated by maintaining, That there is no such thing as unoccupied space or duration; that space is nothing but the order of things coexisting, and duration is nothing but the order of things successive; that all motion is relative, so that if there were only one body in the universe, it would be immoveable; that it is inconsistent with the perfection of the Deity, that there should be any part of space unoccupied by body; and, I suppose, he understood the same of every part of duration. So that,

37. Reid's known sources of relevance here were *A Collection of Papers which passed between the late Learned Mr. Leibnitz and Dr. Clarke in the years 1715 and 1716 relating to the Principles of Natural Philosophy and Religion*; Leibniz, *Système nouveau*; Leibniz, *Principes de la nature et de la grace*, and *Recueil de diverses pièces, sur la philosophie, la religion naturelle, l'histoire, les mathématiques*; cf. 3/II/7; 4/I/2; and 4/II/16, 11. For Leibniz's claim that the principle of sufficient reason (along with the principle of the identity of indiscernibles) turns metaphysics into an exact science, see *Collection of Papers* [i.e. *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*], 'Mr. Leibnitz's Fourth Paper', §5.

according to this system, the world, like its Author, must be infinite, eternal, and immoveable; or, at least, as great in extent and duration as it is possible for it to be.

When it was objected to the principle of a sufficient reason, That of two particles of matter perfectly similar, there can be no reason but the will of GOD for placing *this* here and *that* there; this objection LEIBNITZ obviated by maintaining, That it is impossible that there can be two particles of matter, or any two things perfectly similar. And this seems to have led him to another of his grand principles, which he calls, *The identity of indiscernibles.*

When the principle of a sufficient reason had produced so many surprising discoveries in philosophy, it is no wonder that it should determine the long disputed question about human liberty. This it does in a moment. The determination of the will is an event for which there must be a sufficient reason, that is, something previous, which was necessarily followed by that determination, and could not be followed by any other determination; therefore it was necessary.

Thus we see, that this principle of the necessity of a sufficient reason for every thing, is very fruitful of consequences; and by its‹336› fruits we may judge of it. Those who will adopt it, must adopt all the consequences that hang upon it. To fix them all beyond dispute, no more is necessary but to prove the truth of the principle on which they depend.

I know of no argument offered by LEIBNITZ in proof of this principle, but the authority of ARCHIMEDES, who, he says, makes use of it to prove, that a balance loaded with equal weights on both ends will continue at rest.[38]

I grant it to be good reasoning with regard to a balance, or with regard to any machine, That, when there is no external cause of its motion, it must remain at rest, because the machine has no power of moving itself. But to apply this reasoning to a man, is to take for granted that the man is a machine, which is the very point in question.

LEIBNITZ, and his followers, would have us to take this principle of the necessity of a sufficient reason for every existence, for every event, for every truth, as a first principle, without proof, without explanation; though it be evidently a vague proposition, capable of various meanings, as the word *reason* is. It must have different meanings when applied to things of so different nature as an event and a truth; and it may have

38. See *Collection of Papers*, 'Mr. Leibnitz's Second Paper', §1.

different meanings when applied to the same thing. We cannot therefore form a distinct judgment of it in the gross, but only by taking it to pieces, and applying it to different things, in a precise and distinct meaning.

It can have no connection with the dispute about liberty, except when it is applied to the determinations of the will. Let us therefore suppose a voluntary action of a man; and that the question is put, Whether was there a sufficient reason for this action or not?

‹337› The natural and obvious meaning of this question is, Was there a motive to the action sufficient to justify it to be wise and good, or, at least, innocent? Surely, in this sense, there is not a sufficient reason for every human action, because there are many that are foolish, unreasonable and unjustifiable.

If the meaning of the question be, Was there a cause of the action? Undoubtedly there was: Of every event there must be a cause, that had power sufficient to produce it, and that exerted that power for the purpose. In the present case, either the man was the cause of the action, and then it was a free action, and is justly imputed to him; or it must have had another cause, and cannot justly be imputed to the man. In this sense, therefore, it is granted that there was a sufficient reason for the action; but the question about liberty is not in the least affected by this concession.

If, again, the meaning of the question be, Was there something previous to the action, which made it to be necessarily produced? Every man, who believes that the action was free, will answer to this question in the negative.

I know no other meaning that can be put upon the principle of a sufficient reason, when applied to the determinations of the human will, besides the three I have mentioned. In the first, it is evidently false; in the second, it is true, but does not affect the question about liberty; in the third, it is a mere assertion of necessity without proof.

Before we leave this boasted principle, we may see how it applies to events of another kind. When we say that a Philosopher has assigned a sufficient reason for such a phænomenon, What is the meaning of this? The meaning surely is, That he has accounted for it from the known laws of nature. The sufficient reason of a phænomenon of nature must therefore be some law or ‹338› laws of nature, of which the phænomenon is a necessary consequence. But are we sure that, in this sense, there is a sufficient reason for every phænomenon of nature? I think we are not.

For, not to speak of miraculous events, in which the laws of nature are suspended, or counteracted, we know not but that, in the ordinary course

of GOD's providence, there may be particular acts of his administration, that do not come under any general law of nature.

Established laws of nature are necessary for enabling intelligent creatures to conduct their affairs with wisdom and prudence, and prosecute their ends by proper means; but still it may be fit, that some particular events should not be fixed by general laws, but be directed by particular acts of the Divine government, that so his reasonable creatures may have sufficient inducement to supplicate his aid, his protection and direction, and to depend upon him for the success of their honest designs.

We see that, in human governments, even those that are most legal, it is impossible that every act of the administration should be directed by established laws. Some things must be left to the direction of the executive power, and particularly acts of clemency and bounty to petitioning subjects. That there is nothing analogous to this in the Divine government of the world, no man is able to prove.

We have no authority to pray that GOD would counteract or suspend the laws of nature in our behalf. Prayer, therefore, supposes that he may lend an ear to our prayers, without transgressing the laws of nature. Some have thought that the only use of prayer and devotion is, to produce a proper temper and disposition in ourselves, and that it has no efficacy with the ‹339› Deity. But this is a hypothesis without proof. It contradicts our most natural sentiments, as well as the plain doctrine of scripture, and tends to damp the fervour of every act of devotion.

It was indeed an article of the system of LEIBNITZ, That the Deity, since the creation of the world, never did any thing, excepting in the case of miracles; his work being made so perfect at first, as never to need his interposition. But, in this, he was opposed by Sir ISAAC NEWTON, and others of the ablest Philosophers, nor was he ever able to give any proof of this tenet.

There is no evidence, therefore, that there is a sufficient reason for every natural event; if, by a sufficient reason, we understand some fixed law or laws of nature, of which that event is a necessary consequence.

But what, shall we say, is the sufficient reason for a truth? For our belief of a truth, I think, the sufficient reason is our having good evidence; but what may be meant by a sufficient reason for its being a truth, I am not able to guess, unless the sufficient reason of a contingent truth be, That it *is* true; and, of a necessary truth, that it *must be* true. This makes a man little wiser.

From what has been said, I think it appears, That this principle of the

necessity of a sufficient reason for every thing, is very indefinite in its signification. If it mean, That of every event there must be a cause that had sufficient power to produce it, this is true, and has always been admitted as a first principle in Philosophy, and in common life. If it mean that every event must be necessarily consequent upon something (called a sufficient reason) that went before it; this is a direct assertion of universal fatality, and has many strange, not to say absurd, consequences: But, in this sense, it is neither self-evident, nor has ‹340› any proof of it been offered. And, in general, in every sense in which it has evidence, it gives no new information; and, in every sense in which it would give new information, it wants evidence.

Another argument that has been used to prove liberty of action to be impossible is, That it implies ‘an effect without a cause’.[39]

To this it may be briefly answered, That a free action is an effect produced by a being who had power and will to produce it; therefore it is not an effect without a cause.

To suppose any other cause necessary to the production of an effect, than a being who had the power and the will to produce it, is a contradiction; for it is to suppose that being to have power to produce the effect, and not to have power to produce it.

But as great stress is laid upon this argument by a late zealous advocate for necessity,[40] we shall consider the light in which he puts it.

He introduces this argument with an observation to which I entirely agree: It is, That to establish this doctrine of necessity, nothing is necessary but that, throughout all nature, the same consequences should invariably result from the same circumstances.

I know nothing more that can be desired to establish universal fatality throughout the universe. When it is proved that, through all nature, the same consequences invariably result from the same circumstances, the doctrine of liberty must be given up.

To prevent all ambiguity, I grant, that, in reasoning, the ‹341› same consequences, throughout all nature, will invariably follow from the same premises: Because good reasoning must be good reasoning in

39. See, e.g., Hobbes, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, §§30–3, 34–5; Collins, *Inquiry*, Section II; Hume, *Treatise*, 2.3.1.18: SBN 407; Kames, *Essays*, Essay III; Edwards, *Freedom of Will*, Part II; Priestley, *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, Section II.

40. Reid means Priestley. What follows draws closely on *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, Section II.

all times and places. But this has nothing to do with the doctrine of necessity. The thing to be proved, therefore, in order to establish that doctrine, is, That, through all nature, the same events invariably result from the same circumstances.

Of this capital point, the proof offered by that author is, That an event not preceded by any circumstances that determined it to be what it was, would be *an effect without cause.* Why so? 'For,' says he, 'a *cause* cannot be defined to be any thing but *such previous circumstances as are constantly followed by a certain effect;* the constancy of the result making us conclude, that there must be a *sufficient reason,* in the nature of things, why it should be produced in those circumstances.'[41]

I acknowledge that, if this be the only definition that can be given of a cause, it will follow, That an event not preceded by circumstances that determined it to be what it was, would be, not an *effect* without a cause, which is a contradiction in terms, but an *event* without a cause, which I hold to be impossible. The matter therefore is brought to this issue, Whether this be the only definition that can be given of a cause?

With regard to this point, we may observe, *first*, That this definition of a cause, bating the phraseology of putting a *cause* under the category of *circumstances,* which I take to be new, is the same, in other words, with that which Mr HUME gave, of which he ought to be acknowledged the inventor. For I know of no author before Mr HUME, who maintained, that we have no other notion of a cause, but that it is something prior to the effect, which has been found by experience to be constantly followed by the effect.[42] This is a main pillar of his system; and ‹342› he has drawn very important consequences from this definition, which I am far from thinking this author will adopt.

Without repeating what I have before said of causes in the first of these Essays, and in the second and third chapters of this, I shall here mention some of the consequences that may be justly deduced from this definition of a cause, that we may judge of it by its fruits.

First, It follows from this definition of a cause, that night is the cause of day, and day the cause of night. For no two things have more constantly followed each other since the beginning of the world.

Secondly, It follows from this definition of a cause, that, for what we know, any thing may be the cause of any thing, since nothing is essential

41. *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, p. 11.
42. See Hume, *Treatise*, 1.3.14.31: SBN 169–70.

to a cause but its being constantly followed by the effect. If this be so, what is unintelligent may be the cause of what is intelligent; folly may be the cause of wisdom, and evil of good; all reasoning from the nature of the effect to the nature of the cause, and all reasoning from final causes, must be given up as fallacious.

Thirdly, From this definition of a cause, it follows, that we have no reason to conclude, that every event must have a cause: For innumerable events happen, when it cannot be shewn that there were certain previous circumstances that have constantly been followed by such an event. And though it were certain, that every event we have had access to observe had a cause, it would not follow, that every event must have a cause: For it is contrary to the rules of logic to conclude, that, because a thing has always been, therefore it must be; to reason from what is contingent, to what is necessary.

Fourthly, From this definition of a cause, it would follow, that ‹343› we have no reason to conclude that there was any cause of the creation of this world: For there were no previous circumstances that had been constantly followed by such an effect. And, for the same reason, it would follow from the definition, that whatever was singular in its nature, or the first thing of its kind, could have no cause.

Several of these consequences were fondly embraced by Mr HUME, as necessarily following from his definition of a cause, and as favourable to his system of absolute scepticism. Those who adopt the definition of a cause, from which they follow, may chuse whether they will adopt its consequences, or shew that they do not follow from the definition.

A *second* observation with regard to this argument is, That a definition of a cause may be given, which is not burdened with such untoward consequences.

Why may not an efficient cause be defined to be a being that had power and will to produce the effect? The production of an effect requires active power, and active power, being a quality, must be in a being endowed with that power. Power without will produces no effect; but, where these are conjoined, the effect must be produced.

This, I think, is the proper meaning of the word *cause*, when it is used in metaphysics; and particularly when we affirm, that every thing that begins to exist must have a cause; and when, by reasoning, we prove, that there must be an eternal First Cause of all things.

Was the world produced by previous circumstances which are constantly followed by such an effect? or, Was it produced by a Being

that had power to produce it, and willed its production?

‹344› In natural philosophy, the word *cause* is often used in a very different sense. When an event is produced according to a known law of nature, the law of nature is called the cause of that event. But a law of nature is not the efficient cause of any event. It is only the rule, according to which the efficient cause acts. A law is a thing conceived in the mind of a rational being, not a thing that has a real existence; and, therefore, like a motive, it can neither act nor be acted upon, and consequently cannot be an efficient cause. If there be no being that acts according to the law, it produces no effect.

This author takes it for granted, that every voluntary action of man was determined to be what it was by the laws of nature, in the same sense as mechanical motions are determined by the laws of motion; and that every choice, not thus determined, 'is just as impossible, as that a mechanical motion should depend upon no certain law or rule, or that any other effect should exist without cause'.[43]

It ought here to be observed, that there are two kinds of laws, both very properly called *laws of nature*, which ought not to be confounded. There are moral laws of nature, and physical laws of nature. The first are the rules which God has prescribed to his rational creatures for their conduct. They respect voluntary and free actions only; for no other actions can be subject to moral rules. These laws of nature ought to be always obeyed, but they are often transgressed by men. There is therefore no impossibility in the violation of the moral laws of nature, nor is such a violation an effect without a cause. The transgressor is the cause, and is justly accountable for it.

The physical laws of nature are the rules according to which the Deity commonly acts in his natural government of the world; and, whatever is done according to them, is not done by man, but by God, either immediately or by instruments un ‹345›der his direction. These laws of nature neither restrain the power of the Author of nature, nor bring him under any obligation to do nothing beyond their sphere. He has sometimes acted contrary to them, in the case of miracles, and perhaps often acts without regard to them, in the ordinary course of his providence. Neither miraculous events, which are contrary to the physical laws of nature, nor such ordinary acts of the Divine administration as are without their sphere, are impossible, nor are they *effects without a cause.* God is the

43. *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, p. 17.

cause of them, and to him only they are to be imputed.

That the moral laws of nature are often transgressed by man, is undeniable. If the physical laws of nature make his obedience to the moral laws to be impossible, then he is, in the literal sense, *born under one law, bound unto another,* [44] which contradicts every notion of a righteous government of the world.

But though this supposition were attended with no such shocking consequence, it is merely a supposition; and until it be proved, that every choice or voluntary action of man is determined by the physical laws of nature, this argument for necessity is only the taking for granted the point to be proved.

Of the same kind is the argument for the impossibility of liberty, taken from a balance, which cannot move but as it is moved by the weights put into it. This argument, though urged by almost every writer in defence of necessity,[45] is so pitiful, and has been so often answered, that it scarce deserves to be mentioned.

Every argument in a dispute, which is not grounded on principles granted by both parties, is that kind of sophism which logicians call *petitio principii*; and such, in my apprehension, are all the arguments offered to prove that liberty of action is impossible.

‹346› It may farther be observed, that every argument of this class, if it were really conclusive, must extend to the Deity, as well as to all created beings; and necessary existence, which has always been con - sidered as the prerogative of the Supreme Being, must belong equally to every creature and to every event, even the most trifling.

This I take to be the system of S PINOSA, and of those among the ancients who carried fatality to the highest pitch.

I before referred the reader to Dr CLARKE's argument, which professes to demonstrate, that the First Cause is a free agent.[46] Until that argument shall be shewn to be fallacious, a thing which I have not seen attempted, such weak arguments as have been brought to prove the contrary, ought to have little weight.

44. Reid quotes from the opening lines of the drama *Mustapha* by the courtier poet Fulke Greville (1554–1628).
45. For Priestley's use of the balance analogy, see *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, pp. 30–1. As Reid says, the analogy is deployed by several other necessitarian writers, including Collins, *Inquiry*, pp. 48–50; Kames, *Essays*, pp. 101–2; Edwards, *Freedom of Will*, p. 95. Leibniz criticizes the balance analogy in *Collection of Papers*, 'Mr. Leibnitz's Fifth Paper', §15.
46. See Clarke, *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, Section IX.

CHAP. X.

The same Subject.

WITH regard to the *second* class of arguments for necessity, which are intended to prove, that liberty of action would be hurtful to man, I have only to observe, that it is a fact too evident to be denied, whether we adopt the system of liberty or that of necessity, that men actually receive hurt from their own voluntary actions, and from the voluntary actions of other men; nor can it be pretended, that this fact is inconsistent with the doctrine of liberty, or that it is more unaccountable upon this system than upon that of necessity.

In order, therefore, to draw any solid argument against liberty, from its hurtfulness, it ought to be proved, That, if man ‹347› were a free agent, he would do more hurt to himself, or to others, than he actually does.

To this purpose it has been said, That liberty would make men's actions capricious; that it would destroy the influence of motives; that it would take away the effect of rewards and punishments; and that it would make man absolutely ungovernable.

These arguments have been already considered in the fourth and fifth chapters of this Essay; and, therefore, I shall now proceed to the *third* class of arguments for necessity, which are intended to prove, that, in fact, men are not free agents.

The most formidable argument of this class, and, I think, the only one that has not been considered in some of the preceding chapters, is taken from the prescience of the Deity.

GOD foresees every determination of the human mind. It must therefore be what he foresees it shall be; and therefore must be necessary.[47]

47. This argument interested Reid already in 1736, when he found Samuel Clarke's response to it 'lame', a characterization he uses also for Pierre Bayle's handling of the argument (6/I/17, 3; 3/III, 25, 1); cf. Clarke, Sermon XI, 'Of the Omniscience of God', *Works*, 4 vols., London 1738, vol. I, pp. 69–70; and Bayle, *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial*, 4 vols., 1703–7, Chap. 142. In 7/V/15, 5, Reid says: 'To the Argument drawn from the divine Prescience against the Liberty of Human Actions, we may answer with Dr. Henry More Ench Ethic. Lib 3 ch 2. The prescience of contingent Events, or those that depend upon the will of free Agents is either impossible or it is possible. If it is impossible, then it is no imperfection in the Deity not to know what is absolutely impossible to be known. As it is no imperfection not to be able to do what is impossible to be done. But if on the other hand it is not impossible to foreknow Events which are in human Power then there is no inconsistency between prescience and Liberty &

This argument may be understood three different ways, each of which we shall consider, that we may see all its force.

The necessity of the event may be thought to be a just consequence, either barely from its being certainly future, or barely from its being foreseen, or from the impossibility of its being foreseen, if it was not necessary.

First, It may be thought, that, as nothing can be known to be future which is not certainly future; so, if it be certainly future, it must be necessary.

This opinion has no less authority in its favour than that of ‹348› ARISTOTLE, who indeed held the doctrine of liberty, but believing, at the same time, that whatever is certainly future must be necessary, in order to defend the liberty of human actions, maintained, That contingent events have no certain futurity;[48] but I know of no modern advocate for liberty, who has put the defence of it upon that issue.

It must be granted, that as whatever was, certainly was, and whatever is, certainly is, so whatever shall be, certainly shall be. These are identical propositions, and cannot be doubted by those who conceive them distinctly.

But I know no rule of reasoning by which it can be inferred, that, because an event certainly shall be, therefore its production must be necessary. The manner of its production, whether free or necessary, cannot be concluded from the time of its production, whether it be past, present or future. That it shall be, no more implies that it shall be necessarily, than that it shall be freely produced; for neither present, past nor future, have any more connection with necessity than they have with freedom.

I grant, therefore, that, from events being foreseen, it may be justly concluded, that they are certainly future; but from their being certainly

no argument can be drawn from the one against the other.' Reid is summarizing More, *Enchiridion Ethicum*, Book III, Chap. 2, Section ii, possibly from the English translation *An Account of Virtue*, p. 183. As Reid points out, ibid., Hobbes rejects the argument from divine prescience. See Hobbes, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, §11, 24. Collins (*Inquiry*, Section IV), Edwards (*Freedom of Will*, Part II, Section XII) and Priestley (*Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, Section III) all argue that divine foreknowledge presupposes or entails the truth of the doctrine of necessity. Reid discusses the issue in some detail also in what appears to be a fragment of a letter (7/VI/1, 1–5). Cf. Essay IV, Chap. 11, note 2.

48. See *De Interpretatione*, IX.

future, it does not follow that they are necessary.

Secondly, If it be meant by this argument, that an event must be necessary, merely because it is foreseen, neither is this a just consequence: For it has often been observed, That prescience and knowledge of every kind, being an immanent act, has no effect upon the thing known. Its mode of existence, whether it be free or necessary, is not in the least affected by its being known to be future, any more than by its being known to be past or present. The Deity foresees his own future free actions, ‹349› but neither his foresight nor his purpose makes them necessary. The argument, therefore, taken in this view, as well as in the former, is inconclusive.

A *third* way in which this argument may be understood, is this: It is impossible that an event which is not necessary should be foreseen; therefore every event that is certainly foreseen, must be necessary. Here the conclusion certainly follows from the antecedent proposition, and therefore the whole stress of the argument lies upon the proof of that proposition.

Let us consider, therefore, whether it can be proved, That no free action can be certainly foreseen. If this can be proved, it will follow, either that all actions are necessary, or that all actions cannot be foreseen.

With regard to the general proposition, That it is impossible that any free action can be certainly foreseen, I observe,

First, That every man who believes the Deity to be a free agent, must believe that this proposition not only is incapable of proof, but that it is certainly false: For the man himself foresees, that the Judge of all the earth will always do what is right, and that he will fulfil whatever he has promised; and, at the same time, believes, that, in doing what is right, and in fulfilling his promises, the Deity acts with the most perfect freedom.

Secondly, I observe, That every man who believes that it is an absurdity or contradiction, that any free action should be certainly foreseen, must believe, if he will be consistent, either that the Deity is not a free agent, or that he does not foresee his own actions; nor can we foresee that he will do what is right, and will fulfil his promises.

‹350› *Thirdly*, Without considering the consequences which this general proposition carries in its bosom, which give it a very bad aspect, let us attend to the arguments offered to prove it.

Dr PRIESTLEY has laboured more in the proof of this proposition than any other author I am acquainted with, and maintains it to be, not only a difficulty and a mystery, as it has been called, that a contingent event

should be the object of knowledge, but that, in reality, there cannot be a greater absurdity or contradiction. Let us hear the proof of this.

'For,' says he, 'as certainly as nothing can be known to exist, but what does exist; so certainly can nothing be known to *arise from what does exist,* but what does arise from it or depend upon it. But, according to the definition of the terms, a contingent event does not depend upon any previous known circumstances, since some other event might have arisen in the same circumstances.'[49]

This argument, when stripped of incidental and explanatory clauses, and affected variations of expression, amounts to this: Nothing can be known to arise from what does exist, but what does arise from it: But a contingent event does not arise from what does exist. The conclusion, which is left to be drawn by the reader, must, according to the rules of reasoning, be: Therefore a contingent event cannot be known to arise from what does exist.

It is here very obvious, that a thing may arise from what does exist, two ways, freely or necessarily. A contingent event arises from its cause, not necessarily but freely, and so, that another event might have arisen from the same cause, in the same circumstances.

The second proposition of the argument is, That a contingent ‹351› event does not depend upon any previous known circumstances, which I take to be only a variation of the term of *not arising from what does exist.* Therefore, in order to make the two propositions to correspond, we must understand by *arising from what does exist,* arising necessarily from what does exist. When this ambiguity is removed, the argument stands thus: Nothing can be known to arise necessarily from what does exist, but what does necessarily arise from it: But a contingent event does not arise necessarily from what does exist; therefore a contingent event cannot be known to arise necessarily from what does exist.

I grant the whole; but the conclusion of this argument is not what he undertook to prove, and therefore the argument is that kind of sophism which logicians call *ignorantia elenchi.*[50]

The thing to be proved is not, That a contingent event cannot be known to arise necessarily from what exists; but that a contingent future event cannot be the object of knowledge.

To draw the argument to this conclusion, it must be put thus: Nothing

49. *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, p. 20.
50. Reid's final manuscript has the correct *ignoratio elenchi* (1/ II/4, 62).

can be known to arise from what does exist, but what arises necessarily from it: But a contingent event does not arise necessarily from what does exist; therefore a contingent event cannot be known to arise from what does exist.

The conclusion here is what it ought to be; but the first proposition assumes the thing to be proved, and therefore the argument is what logicianscall *petitio principii.*

To the same purpose he says, 'That nothing can be known at present, except itself or its necessary cause exist at present.'[51]

This is affirmed, but I find no proof of it.

‹352› Again he says, 'That knowledge supposes an object, which, in this case, does not exist.' [52] It is true that knowledge supposes an object, and every thing that is known is an object of knowledge, whether past, present, or future, whether contingent or necessary.

Upon the whole, the arguments I can find upon this point, bear no proportion to the confidence of the assertion, that there cannot be a greater absurdity or contradiction, than that a contingent event should be the object of knowledge.

To those who, without pretending to shew a manifest absurdity or contradiction in the knowledge of future contingent events, are still of opinion, that it is impossible that the future free actions of man, a being of imperfect wisdom and virtue, should be certainly foreknown,[53] I would humbly offer the following considerations.

1. I grant that there is no knowledge of this kind in man; and this is the cause that we find it so difficult to conceive it in any other being.

All our knowledge of future events is drawn either from their necessary connection with the present course of nature, or from their connection with the character of the agent that produces them. Our knowledge, even of those future events that necessarily result from the established laws of nature, is hypothetical. It supposes the continuance of those laws with which they are connected. And how long those laws may be continued, we have no certain knowledge. GOD only knows when the present course of nature shall be changed, and therefore he only has

51. *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, p. 21.
52. *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, p. 21.
53. Reid might have James Beattie in mind here. In *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* , Beattie was prepared to countenance the idea that God cannot foresee free human actions, since 'it implies not any reflection on the divine power, to say, that it cannot perform impossibilities' (pp. 364–5).

certain knowledge even of events of this kind.

The character of perfect wisdom and perfect rectitude in the ‹353› Deity gives us certain knowledge that he will always be true in all his declarations, faithful in all his promises, and just in all his dispensations. But when we reason from the character of men to their future actions, though, in many cases, we have such probability as we rest upon in our most important worldly concerns, yet we have no certainty, because men are imperfect in wisdom and in virtue. If we had even the most perfect knowledge of the character and situation of a man, this would not be sufficient to give certainty to our knowledge of his future actions; because, in some actions, both good and bad men deviate from their general character.

The prescience of the Deity, therefore, must be different not only in degree, but in kind, from any knowledge we can attain of futurity.

2. Though we can have no conception how the future free actions of men may be known by the Deity, this is not a sufficient reason to conclude that they cannot be known. Do we know, or can we conceive, how GOD knows the secrets of mens hearts? Can we conceive how GOD made this world without any pre-existent matter? All the ancient Philosophers believed this to be impossible: And for what reason but this, that they could not conceive how it could be done. Can we give any better reason for believing that the actions of men cannot be certainly foreseen?

3. Can we conceive how we ourselves have certain knowledge by those faculties with which GOD has endowed us? If any man thinks that he understands distinctly how he is conscious of his own thoughts; how he perceives external objects by his senses; how he remembers past events, I am afraid that he is not yet so wise as to understand his own ignorance.

4. There seems to me to be a great analogy between the pre‹354›science of future contingents, and the memory of past contingents.[54] We possess the last in some degree, and therefore find no difficulty in believing that it may be perfect in the Deity. But the first we have in no degree, and therefore are apt to think it impossible.

In both, the object of knowledge is neither what presently exists, nor has any necessary connection with what presently exists. Every argument

54. In a letter to James Gregory, Reid comments on this issue: ‘The analogy between memory and prescience is, I believe, a notion of my own. But I shall be open to conviction on this and every thing else we may differ about.’ *Correspondence*, p. 163, Letter No. 83, 8 June 1783.

brought to prove the impossibility of prescience, proves, with equal force, the impossibility of memory. If it be true that nothing can be known to arise from what does exist, but what necessarily arises from it, it must be equally true, that nothing can be known to have gone before what does exist, but what must necessarily have gone before it. If it be true that nothing future can be known unless its necessary cause exist at present, it must be equally true that nothing past can be known unless something consequent, with which it is necessarily connected, exist at present. If the fatalist should say, That past events are indeed necessarily connected with the present, he will not surely venture to say, that it is by tracing this necessary connection, that we remember the past.

Why then should we think prescience impossible in the Almighty, when he has given us a faculty which bears a strong analogy to it, and which is no less unaccountable to the human understanding, than prescience is. It is more reasonable, as well as more agreeable to the sacred writings, to conclude with a pious father of the church, 'Quocirca nullo modo cogimur, aut retentâ praescientiâ D EI tollere voluntatis arbitrium, aut retento voluntatis arbitrio, D EUM, quod nefas est, negare præscium futurorum: Sed utrumque amplectimur, utrumque fideliter et veraciter confitemur: Illud ut bene credamus; hoc ut bene vivamus.' AUG.[55]

‹355›

CHAP. XI.

Of the Permission of Evil.

ANOTHER use has been made of Divine prescience by the advocates for necessity, which it is proper to consider before we leave this subject.

It has been said, 'That all those consequences follow from the Divine prescience which are thought most alarming in the scheme of necessity; and particularly GOD's being the proper cause of moral evil. For, to suppose GOD to foresee and permit what it was in his power to have prevented, is the very same thing, as to suppose him to will, and directly

55. Transl. 'Hence we are in no way compelled either to preserve God's prescience by abolishing our free will, or to safeguard our free will by denying (blasphemously) the divine foreknowledge. We embrace both truths, and acknowledge them in faith and sincerity, the one for a right belief, the other for a right life.' Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 5, Chap. 10, p. 195.

to cause it. He distinctly foresees all the actions of a man's life, and all the consequences of them: If, therefore, he did not think any particular man and his conduct proper for his plan of creation and providence, he certainly would not have introduced him into being at all.'[56]

In this reasoning we may observe, that a supposition is made which seems to contradict itself.

That all the actions of a particular man should be distinctly foreseen, and, at the same time, that that man should never be brought into existence, seems to me to be a contradiction: And the same contradiction there is, in supposing any action to be distinctly foreseen, and yet prevented. For, if it be foreseen, it shall happen; and, if it be prevented, it shall not happen, and therefore could not be foreseen.

The knowledge here supposed is neither prescience nor science,‹356› but something very different from both. It is a kind of knowledge, which some metaphysical divines, in their controversies about the order of the Divine decrees, a subject far beyond the limits of human understanding, attributed to the Deity, and of which other divines denied the possibility, while they firmly maintained the Divine prescience.

It was called *scientia media*, to distinguish it from prescience; and by this *scientia media* was meant, not the knowing from eternity all things that shall exist, which is prescience, nor the knowing all the connections and relations of things that exist or may be conceived, which is science, but a knowledge of things contingent, that never did nor shall exist. For instance, the knowing every action that would be done by a man who is barely conceived, and shall never be brought into existence.[57]

56. This is not a quotation from any particular advocate of necessity, but a summary of a very common line of argument: see, e.g., Collins, *Inquiry*, I.iv; Edwards, *Freedom of Will*, II, xi–xii; Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 8.32: SBN 99–100; Kames, *Essays*, pp. 108–10; Priestley, *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, Section III.

57. The doctrine of *scientia media* (mediate knowledge) was adopted into Arminianism at an early stage from the Jesuit philosophers Luis de Molina (1535–1600) and Francisco Suàrez (1548–1617). It was a common target of polemics in Calvinist or Reformed Orthodox theology. When the Glasgow Professor of Divinity John Simson was charged with heresy in 1715, one of the accusations brought by the evangelical minister James Webster was that Simson taught doctrine 'too near of Kin to the JESUIT'S and ARMINIAN'S SCIENTIA MEDIA', to which Simson replied that, 'I Yearly Refute That *Scientia Media*; What I Teach about the Providence of GOD, is as Little a Kin to it as what our *Confession* Teaches.' *The Case of Mr John Simson Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow. Consisting of the Original Papers of the Process carried on against*

Against the possibility of the *scientia media* arguments may be urged, which cannot be applied to prescience. Thus it may be said, that nothing can be known but what is true. It is true that the future actions of a free agent shall exist, and therefore we see no impossibility in its being known that they shall exist: But with regard to the free actions of an agent that never did nor shall exist, there is nothing true, and therefore nothing can be known. To say that the being conceived, would certainly act in such a way, if placed in such a situation, if it have any meaning, is to say, That his acting in that way is the consequence of the conception; but this contradicts the supposition of its being a free action.

Things merely conceived have no relations or connections but such as are implied in the conception, or are consequent from it. Thus I conceive two circles in the same plane. If this be all I conceive, it is not true that these circles are equal or unequal, because neither of these relations is implied in the conception; yet if the two circles really existed, they must be ‹357› either equal or unequal. Again, I conceive two circles in the same plane, the distance of whose centres is equal to the sum of their semidiameters. It is true of these circles, that they will touch one another, because this follows from the conception; but it is not true that they will be equal or unequal, because neither of these relations is implied in the conception, nor is consequent from it.

In like manner, I can conceive a being who has power to do an indifferent action, or not to do it. It is not true that he would do it, nor is it true that he would not do it, because neither is implied in my conception, nor follows from it; and what is not true cannot be known.

Though I do not perceive any fallacy in this argument against a *scientia media*, I am sensible how apt we are to err in applying what belongs to our conceptions and our knowledge, to the conceptions and knowledge of the Supreme Being; and, therefore, without pretending to determine for or against a *scientia media*, I only observe, that, to suppose that the Deity prevents what he foresees by his prescience, is a contradiction, and that to know that a contingent event which he sees fit not to permit would certainly happen if permitted, is not prescience, but the *scientia media,* whose existence or possibility we are under no necessity of admitting.

Him by Mr John Webster, pp. 26 and 121. The issue lived on also in eighteenth-century Scottish moral thought. See, e.g., Gershom Carmichael, *Synopsis of Natural Theology*, in *Natural Rights*, pp. 261–2; and Francis Hutcheson, *A Synopsis of Metaphysics*, pp. 170–1. Cf. Essay IV, Chap. 10, note 1.

Waving all dispute about *scientia media*, we acknowledge, that nothing can happen under the administration of the Deity, which he does not see fit to permit. The permission of natural and moral evil, is a phænomenon which cannot be disputed. To account for this phænomenon under the government of a Being of infinite goodness, justice, wisdom and power, has, in all ages, been considered as difficult to human reason, whether we embrace the system of liberty or that of necessity. But, if the difficulty of accounting for this phænomenon upon the system ‹358› of necessity, be as great as it is upon the system of liberty, it can have no weight when used as an argument against liberty.

The defenders of necessity, to reconcile it to the principles of Theism, find themselves obliged to give up all the moral attributes of GOD, excepting that of goodness, or a desire to produce happiness. [58] This they hold to be the sole motive of his making and governing the universe. Justice, veracity, faithfulness, are only modifications of goodness, the means of promoting its purposes, and are exercised only so far as they serve that end. Virtue is acceptable to him and vice displeasing, only as the first tends to produce happiness and the last misery. He is the proper cause and agent of all moral evil as well as good; but it is for a good end, to produce the greater happiness to his creatures. He does evil that good may come, and this end sanctifies the worst actions that contribute to it. All the wickedness of men being the work of GOD, he must, when he surveys it, pronounce it, as well as all his other works, to be very good.

This view of the Divine nature, the only one consistent with the scheme of necessity, appears to me much more shocking than the permission of evil upon the scheme of liberty. It is said, that it requires only *strength of mind* to embrace it:[59] To me it seems to require much strength of countenance to profess it.

In this system, as in CLEANTHES' Tablature of the Epicurean system, pleasure or happiness is placed upon the throne as the queen, to whom all the virtues bear the humble office of menial servants.[60]

As the end of the Deity, in all his actions, is not his own good, which can receive no addition, but the good of his creatures; and, as his creatures

58. This is a prominent line of thought in the writings of both Hartley and Priestley, for whom the goodness of God is to be understood solely in terms of his concern for the happiness of his creatures: see Hartley, *Observations on Man*, Part 2, Chap. 1, proposition 4; and Priestley, *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, Section X.
59. See Priestley, *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, p. xxiv.
60. Reid alludes to Cicero, *De finibus*, II.xxi.

are capable of this disposition in some degree, is he not pleased with this image of himself in his creatures, and displeased with the contrary? Why then should ‹359› he be the author of malice, envy, revenge, tyranny and oppression, in their hearts? Other vices that have no malevolence in them may please such a Deity, but surely malevolence cannot please him.

If we form our notions to the moral attributes of the Deity from what we see of his government of the world, from the dictates of reason and conscience, or from the doctrine of revelation, justice, veracity, faithfulness, the love of virtue and dislike of vice, appear to be no less essential attributes of his nature than goodness.

In man, who is made after the image of God, goodness or benevolence is indeed an essential part of virtue, but it is not the whole.

I am at a loss what arguments can be brought to prove goodness to be essential to the Deity, which will not, with equal force, prove other moral attributes to be so; or what objections can be brought against the latter, which have not equal strength against the former, unless it be admitted to be an objection against other moral attributes, that they do not accord with the doctrine of necessity.

If other moral evils may be attributed to the Deity as the means of promoting general good, why may not false declarations and false promises? And then what ground have we left to believe the truth of what he reveals, or to rely upon what he promises?

Supposing this strange view of the Divine nature were to be adopted in favour of the doctrine of necessity, there is still a great difficulty to be resolved.

Since it is supposed, that the Supreme Being had no other end ‹360› in making and governing the universe, but to produce the greatest degree of happiness to his creatures in general, how comes it to pass, that there is so much misery in a system made and governed by infinite wisdom and power for a contrary purpose?

The solution of this difficulty leads us necessarily to another hypothesis, That all the misery and vice that is in the world is a necessary ingredient in that system which produces the greatest sum of happiness upon the whole. This connection betwixt the greatest sum of happiness and all the misery that is in the universe, must be fatal and necessary in the nature of things, so that even Almighty power cannot break it: For benevolence can never lead to inflict misery without necessity.

This necessary connection between the greatest sum of happiness upon the whole, and all the natural and moral evil that is, or has been, or shall

be, being once established, it is impossible for mortal eyes to discern how far this evil may extend, or on whom it may happen to fall; whether this fatal connection may be temporary or eternal, or what proportion of the happiness may be balanced by it.

A world made by perfect wisdom and Almighty power, for no other end but to make it happy, presents the most pleasing prospect that can be imagined. We expect nothing but uninterrupted happiness to prevail for ever. But, alas! When we consider that in this happiest system, there must be necessarily all the misery and vice we see, and how much more we know not, how is the prospect darkened!

These two hypotheses, the one limiting the moral character of the Deity, the other limiting his power, seem to me to be the necessary consequences of necessity, when it is joined with Theism; and they have accordingly been adopted by the ablest defenders of that doctrine.

‹361› If some defenders of liberty, by limiting too rashly the Divine prescience, in order to defend that system, have raised high indignation in their opponents; have they not equal ground of indignation against those, who, to defend necessity, limit the moral perfection of the Deity, and his Almighty power?

Let us consider, on the other hand, what consequences may be fairly drawn from GOD's permitting the abuse of liberty in agents on whom he has bestowed it.

If it be asked, Why does GOD permit so much sin in his creation? I confess I cannot answer the question, but must lay my hand upon my mouth.[61] He giveth no account of his conduct to the children of men.[62] It is our part to obey his commands, and not to say unto him, Why dost thou thus?[63]

Hypotheses might be framed; but, while we have ground to be satisfied, that he does nothing but what is right, it is more becoming us to acknowledge that the ends and reasons of his universal government are beyond our knowledge, and perhaps beyond the comprehension of human understanding. We cannot penetrate so far into the counsel of the Almighty, as to know all the reasons why it became him, of whom are all things, and to whom are all things,[64] to create, not only machines, which are solely moved by his hand, but servants and children, who, by obeying

61. See Job 40:4.
62. Cf. Job 33:13.
63. Perhaps an echo of John Donne's poem 'The Sun Rising', l. 2.
64. Reid alludes to either 1 Corinthians 8:6 or *The Westminster Confession*, II.2 (or to both).

his commands, and imitating his moral perfections, might rise to a high degree of glory and happiness in his favour, or, by perverse disobedience, might incur guilt and just punishment. In this he appears to us awful in his justice, as well as amiable in his goodness.

But, as he disdains not to appeal to men for the equity of his proceedings towards them when his character is impeached, we may, with humble reverence, plead for GOD, and vindicate ‹362› that moral excellence which is the glory of his nature, and of which the image is the glory and the perfection of man.

Let us observe first of all, that *to permit* hath two meanings. It signifies not to forbid; and it signifies not to hinder by superior power. In the first of these senses, GOD never permits sin. His law forbids every moral evil. By his laws and by his government, he gives every encouragement to good conduct, and every discouragement to bad. But he does not always, by his superior power, hinder it from being committed. This is the ground of the accusation; and this, it is said, is the very same thing as directly to will and to cause it.

As this is asserted without proof, and is far from being self-evident, it might be sufficient to deny it until it be proved. But, without resting barely on the defensive, we may observe, that the only moral attributes that can be supposed inconsistent with the permission of sin, are either goodness or justice.

The defenders of necessity, with whom we have to do in this point, as they maintain that goodness is the only essential moral attribute of the Deity, and the motive of all his actions, must, if they will be consistent, maintain, That to will, and directly to cause sin, much more not to hinder it, is consistent with perfect goodness, nay, that goodness is a sufficient motive to justify the willing and directly causing it.

With regard to them, therefore, it is surely unnecessary to attempt to reconcile the permission of sin with the goodness of GOD, since an inconsistency between that attribute and the causing of sin would overturn their whole system.

If the causing of moral evil, and being the real author of it, be consistent with perfect goodness, what pretence can there be ‹363› to say, that not to hinder it is inconsistent with perfect goodness?

What is incumbent upon them, therefore, to prove, is, That the permission of sin is inconsistent with justice; and, upon this point, we are ready to join issue with them.

But what pretence can there be to say, that the permission of sin is

perfectly consistent with goodness in the Deity, but inconsistent with justice?

Is it not as easy to conceive, that he should permit sin, though virtue be his delight, as that he inflicts misery, when his sole delight is to bestow happiness? Should it appear incredible, that the permission of sin may tend to promote virtue, to them who believe that the infliction of misery is necessary to promote happiness?

The justice, as well as the goodness of God's moral government of mankind, appears in this: That his laws are not arbitrary nor grievous, as it is only by the obedience of them that our nature can be perfected and qualified for future happiness; that he is ready to aid our weakness, to help our infirmities, and not to suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear; that he is not strict to mark iniquity, or to execute judgment speedily against an evil work, but is long-suffering, and waits to be gracious; that he is ready to receive the humble penitent to his favour; that he is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted of him; that of every man he will require an account, proportioned to the talents he hath received; that he delights in mercy, but hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked; and therefore in punishing will never go beyond the demerit of the criminal, nor beyond what the rules of his universal government require.

‹364› There were, in ancient ages, some who said, the way of the Lord is not equal; to whom the Prophet, in the name of God, makes this reply, which, in all ages, is sufficient to repel this accusation. Hear now, O house of Israel, is not my way equal, are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, for his iniquity which he hath done shall he die. Again, when a wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal, are not your ways unequal? Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby you have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God.[65]

Another argument for necessity has been lately offered, which we shall very briefly consider.

65. Ezekiel 18:25–32.

It has been maintained, that the power of thinking is the result of a certain modification of matter, and that a certain configuration of brain makes a soul; and, if man be wholly a material being, it is said, that it will not be denied, that he must be a mechanical being; that the doctrine of necessity is a direct inference from that of materialism, and its undoubted consequence.[66]

As this argument can have no weight with those who do not see reason to embrace this system of materialism; so, even with those who do, it seems to me to be a mere sophism.

Philosophers have been wont to conceive matter to be an inert passive being, and to have certain properties inconsistent with the power of thinking or of acting. But a Philosopher ‹365› arises, who proves, we shall suppose, that we were quite mistaken in our notion of matter; that it has not the properties we supposed, and, in fact, has no properties but those of attraction and repulsion; [67] but still he thinks, that, being matter, it will not be denied that it is a mechanical being, and that the doctrine of necessity is a direct inference from that of materialism.

Herein, however, he deceives himself. If matter be what we conceived it to be, it is equally incapable of thinking and of acting freely. But if the properties, from which we drew this conclusion, have no reality, as he thinks he has proved; if it have the powers of attraction and repulsion, and require only a certain configuration to make it think rationally, it will be impossible to shew any good reason why the same configuration may not make it act rationally and freely. If its reproach of solidity, inertness and sluggishness be wiped off; and if it be raised in our esteem to a nearer approach to the nature of what we call spiritual and immaterial beings, why should it still be nothing but a mechanical being? Is its solidity, inertness and sluggishness, to be first removed to make it capable of thinking, and then restored in order to make it incapable of acting?

Those, therefore, who reason justly from this system of materialism will easily perceive, that the doctrine of necessity is so far from being a direct inference, that it can receive no support from it.

66. In the Preface to *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated* Priestley claims that ‘the doctrine of necessity is a direct inference from materialism’ (p. xx). However, none of the arguments given in the *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated* relies on materialist premises.

67. Reid refers to the new theory of matter developed by the Serbian–Italian Jesuit Roger Boscovich (1711–87) in *Theoria philosophiae naturalis* , and espoused by Priestley in the *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit* . Cf. *Reid on the Animate Creation*, p. 220; and 3/I/10, 1–2.

To conclude this Essay: Extremes of all kinds ought to be avoided; yet men are prone to run into them; and, to shun one extreme, we often run into the contrary.

Of all extremes of opinion, none are more dangerous than those that exalt the powers of man too high, on the one hand, or sink them too low, on the other.

‹366› By raising them too high, we feed pride and vain-glory, we lose the sense of our dependence upon God, and engage in attempts beyond our abilities. By depressing them too low, we cut the sinews of action and of obligation, and are tempted to think, that, as we can do nothing, we have nothing to do, but to be carried passively along by the stream of necessity.

Some good men, apprehending that, to kill pride and vain-glory, our active powers cannot be too much depressed, have been led, by zeal for religion, to deprive us of all active power.

Other good men, by a like zeal, have been led to depreciate the human understanding, and to put out the light of nature and reason, in order to exalt that of revelation.

Those weapons which were taken up in support of religion, are now employed to overturn it; and what was, by some, accounted the bulwark of orthodoxy, is become the strong hold of atheism and infidelity.[68]

Atheists join hands with Theologians, in depriving man of all active power, that they may destroy all moral obligation, and all sense of right and wrong. They join hands with Theologians, in depreciating the human understanding, that they may lead us into absolute scepticism.

God, in mercy to the human race, has made us of such a frame, that no speculative opinion whatsoever can root out the sense of guilt and demerit when we do wrong, nor the peace and joy of a good conscience when we do what is right. No speculative opinion can root out a regard to the testimony of our senses, of our memory, and of our rational faculties. But we have reason to be jealous of opinions which run counter to those natural sentiments of the human mind, and tend to shake, though they never can eradicate them.

‹367› There is little reason to fear, that the conduct of men, with regard

68. Reid probably has Bayle in mind here. He seems to have had great respect for Bayle, but he did come to the following cautious overall assessment: ‘Bayle seems rather a Sceptick than a Dogmatist on the Point of Liberty as in most other points’, 3/III/25, 1. Reid might also be alluding to the ironic use made by Hume of the language of fideism in his writings on religious topics.

to the concerns of the present life, will ever be much affected, either by the doctrine of necessity, or by scepticism. It were to be wished, that men's conduct, with regard to the concerns of another life, were in as little danger from those opinions.

In the present state, we see some who zealously maintain the doctrine of necessity, others who as zealously maintain that of liberty. One would be apt to think, that a practical belief of these contrary systems should produce very different conduct in them that hold them; yet we see no such difference in the affairs of common life.

The fatalist deliberates, and resolves, and plights his faith. He lays down a plan of conduct, and prosecutes it with vigour and industry. He exhorts and commands, and holds those to be answerable for their conduct to whom he hath committed any charge. He blames those that are false or unfaithful to him as other men do. He perceives dignity and worth in some characters and actions, and in others demerit and turpitude. He resents injuries, and is grateful for good offices.

If any man should plead the doctrine of necessity to exculpate murder, theft, or robbery, or even wilful negligence in the discharge of his duty, his judge, though a fatalist, if he had common sense, would laugh at such a plea, and would not allow it even to alleviate the crime.

In all such cases, he sees that it would be absurd not to act and to judge as those ought to do who believe themselves and other men to be free agents, just as the sceptic, to avoid absurdity, must, when he goes into the world, act and judge like other men who are not sceptics.

‹368› If the fatalist be as little influenced by the opinion of necessity in his moral and religious concerns, and in his expectations concerning another world, as he is in the common affairs of life, his speculative opinion will probably do him little hurt. But, if he trust so far to the doctrine of necessity, as to indulge sloth and inactivity in his duty, and hope to exculpate himself to his Maker by that doctrine, let him consider whether he sustains this excuse from his servants and dependants, when they are negligent or unfaithful in what is committed to their charge.

Bishop BUTLER, in his *Analogy*, has an excellent chapter upon *the opinion of necessity considered as influencing practice,* which I think highly deserving the consideration of those who are inclined to that opinion.[69]

69. Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* , Chap. VI. Reid made extensive notes on Butler's *Analogy*; see 3061/10 and 3061/12.

‹369›

ESSAY V.

OF MORALS.

CHAP. I.

Of the First Principles of Morals.

MORALS, like all other sciences, must have first principles, on which all moral reasoning is grounded.

In every branch of knowledge where disputes have been raised, it is useful to distinguish the first principles from the superstructure. They are the foundation on which the whole fabric of the science leans; and whatever is not supported by this foundation can have no stability.

In all rational belief, the thing believed is either itself a first principle, or it is by just reasoning deduced from first principles. When men differ about deductions of reasoning, the appeal must be to the rules of reasoning, which have been very unanimously fixed from the days of ARISTOTLE. But when they differ about a first principle, the appeal is made to another tribunal; to that of common sense.

How the genuine decisions of common sense may be distinguished from the counterfeit, has been considered in essay sixth, on the Intellectual Powers of Man, chapter fourth, to which the reader is referred. What I would here observe is, That as first principles differ from deductions of reasoning in the nature ‹370› of their evidence, and must be tried by a different standard when they are called in question, it is of importance to know to which of these two classes a truth which we would examine, belongs. When they are not distinguished, men are apt to demand proof for every thing they think fit to deny: And when we attempt to prove by direct argument, what is really self-evident, the reasoning will always be inconclusive; for it will either take for granted the thing to be proved, or something not more evident; and so, instead of giving strength to the conclusion, will rather tempt those to doubt of it, who never did so before.

I propose, therefore, in this chapter, to point out some of the first principles of morals, without pretending to a complete enumeration.

The principles I am to mention, relate either to virtue in general, or to the different particular branches of virtue, or to the comparison of virtues

where they seem to interfere.

1. There are some things in human conduct, that merit approbation and praise, others that merit blame and punishment; and different degrees either of approbation or of blame, are due to different actions.

2. What is in no degree voluntary, can neither deserve moral approbation nor blame.

3. What is done from unavoidable necessity may be agreeable or disagreeable, useful or hurtful, but cannot be the object either of blame or of moral approbation.

4. Men may be highly culpable in omitting what they ought to have done, as well as in doing what they ought not.

5. We ought to use the best means we can to be well informed ‹371› of our duty, by serious attention to moral instruction; by observing what we approve, and what we disapprove, in other men, whether our acquaintance, or those whose actions are recorded in history; by reflecting often, in a calm and dispassionate hour, on our own past conduct, that we may discern what was wrong, what was right, and what might have been better; by deliberating coolly and impartially upon our future conduct, as far as we can foresee the opportunities we may have of doing good, or the temptations to do wrong; and by having this principle deeply fixed in our minds, that as moral excellence is the true worth and glory of a man, so the knowledge of our duty is to every man, in every station of life, the most important of all knowledge.

6. It ought to be our most serious concern to do our duty as far as we know it, and to fortify our minds against every temptation to deviate from it; by maintaining a lively sense of the beauty of right conduct, and of its present and future reward, of the turpitude of vice, and of its bad consequences here and hereafter; by having always in our eye the noblest examples; by the habit of subjecting our passions to the government of reason; by firm purposes and resolutions with regard to our conduct; by avoiding occasions of temptation when we can; and by imploring the aid of him who made us, in every hour of temptation.

These principles concerning virtue and vice in general, must appear self-evident to every man who hath a conscience, and who hath taken pains to exercise this natural power of his mind. I proceed to others that are more particular.[1]

1. In the manuscripts Reid talks of ‘axioms’ rather than ‘principles’, and his numbering varies. See 7/V/5, 1–6, where the first principle (using the order in the present

1. We ought to prefer a greater good, though more distant, to a less; and a less evil to a greater.

A regard to our own good, though we had no conscience,⟨372⟩ dictates this principle; and we cannot help disapproving the man that acts contrary to it, as deserving to lose the good which he wantonly threw away, and to suffer the evil which he knowingly brought upon his own head.

We observed before, [2] that the ancient moralists, and many among the modern, have deduced the whole of morals from this principle, and that when we make a right estimate of goods and evils according to their degree, their dignity, their duration, and according as they are more or less in our power, it leads to the practice of every virtue: More directly, indeed, to the virtues of self-government, to prudence, to temperance, and to fortitude; and, though more indirectly, even to justice, humanity, and all the social virtues, when their influence upon our happiness is well understood.

Though it be not the noblest principle of conduct, it has this peculiar advantage, that its force is felt by the most ignorant, and even by the most abandoned.

Let a man's moral judgment be ever so little improved by exercise, or ever so much corrupted by bad habits, he cannot be indifferent to his own happiness or misery. When he is become insensible to every nobler motive to right conduct, he cannot be insensible to this. And though to act from this motive solely may be called *prudence* rather than *virtue*, yet this prudence deserves some regard upon its own account, and much more as it is the friend and ally of virtue, and the enemy of all vice; and as it gives a favourable testimony of virtue to those who are deaf to every other recommendation.

text) is identified with 'the selfish system', the second with the ancient stoics, the third with Pufendorf, Cumberland and Hutcheson, and the fourth, as here, with the Gospel. In 7/V/12, 2–3, Reid contrasts the selfish 'axiom' of the Epicureans, including Gassendi, with that of the Stoics, adding: 'I chuse a Middle way'. In yet another fragment (8/III/7, 8) he refers for prin -ciple No. 4 to Martino Martini, *Sinicæ historiæ, Decas I*; Garcilaso de la Vega, *Comentarios reales del Perú*, in one of the English translations; Hobbes *De cive* ch. 3 §26; Isocrates, *Nicocles, or the Cyprians* 61; and Luke 7:12. For principle No. 2, it is Juvenal, *Satires* 11: 27; Persius, *Satires* 3: 66–72; and Cicero, *De officiis* I.28 (101). Principle No. 3 is illustrated from Cicero, *De officiis* I.7 (22). In a fragment, probably of a lecture (7/VII/9, 1), Reid invokes Livy to explain principle No. 3 through the fable of Menenius Agrippa and the parable of the human and the political body.

2. See Essay III, Part III, Chaps. 2–3.

If a man can be induced to do his duty even from a regard to his own happiness, he will soon find reason to love virtue for her own sake, and to act from motives less mercenary.

‹373› I cannot therefore approve of those moralists, who would banish all persuasives to virtue taken from the consideration of private good. In the present state of human nature these are not useless to the best, and they are the only means left of reclaiming the abandoned.

2. As far as the intention of nature appears in the constitution of man, we ought to comply with that intention, and to act agreeably to it.

The Author of our being hath given us not only the power of acting within a limited sphere, but various principles or springs of action, of different nature and dignity, to direct us in the exercise of our active power.

From the constitution of every species of the inferior animals, and especially from the active principles which nature has given them, we easily perceive the manner of life for which nature intended them; and they uniformly act the part to which they are led by their constitution, without any reflection upon it, or intention of obeying its dictates. Man only, of the inhabitants of this world, is made capable of observing his own constitution, what kind of life it is made for, and of acting according to that intention, or contrary to it. He only is capable of yielding an intentional obedience to the dictates of his nature, or of rebelling against them.

In treating of the principles of action in man, it has been shewn, that as his natural instincts and bodily appetites, are well adapted to the preservation of his natural life, and to the continuance of the species; so his natural desires, affections, and passions, when uncorrupted by vicious habits, and under the government of the leading principles of reason and conscience, are excellently fitted for the rational and social life. Every vicious action shews an excess, or defect, or wrong direction of some na‹374›tural spring of action, and therefore may, very justly, be said to be unnatural. Every virtuous action agrees with the uncorrupted principles of human nature.

The Stoics defined virtue to be a life according to nature. Some of them more accurately, a life according to the nature of man, in so far as it is superior to that of brutes. The life of a brute is according to the nature of the brute; but it is neither virtuous nor vicious. The life of a moral agent cannot be according to his nature, unless it be virtuous. That conscience, which is in every man's breast, is the law of G OD written in his heart,

which he cannot disobey without acting unnaturally, and being self-condemned.

The intention of nature, in the various active principles of man, in the desires of power, of knowledge, and of esteem, in the affection to children, to near relations, and to the communities to which we belong, in gratitude, in compassion, and even in resentment and emulation, is very obvious, and has been pointed out in treating of those principles. [3] Nor is it less evident, that reason and conscience are given us to regulate the inferior principles, so that they may conspire, in a regular and consistent plan of life, in pursuit of some worthy end.

3. No man is born for himself only. Every man, therefore, ought to consider himself as a member of the common society of mankind, and of those subordinate societies to which he belongs, such as family, friends, neighbourhood, country, and to do as much good as he can, and as little hurt to the societies of which he is a part.

This axiom leads directly to the practice of every social virtue, and indirectly to the virtues of self-government, by which only we can be qualified for discharging the duty we owe to society.

‹375› 4. In every case, we ought to act that part towards another, which we would judge to be right in him to act towards us, if we were in his circumstances and he in ours; or, more generally, what we approve in others, that we ought to practise in like circumstances, and what we condemn in others we ought not to do.[4]

If there be any such thing as right or wrong in the conduct of moral agents, it must be the same to all in the same circumstances.

We stand all in the same relation to him who made us, and will call us to account for our conduct; for with him there is no respect of persons. We stand in the same relation to one another as members of the great community of mankind. The duties consequent upon the different ranks and offices and relations of men are the same to all in the same circumstances.

It is not want of judgment, but want of candour and impartiality, that hinders men from discerning what they owe to others. They are quick-sighted enough in discerning what is due to themselves. When they are

3. See above, Essay III, Part II, Chap. 2, ‘Of Desires’; Chap. 4, ‘Of the Particular Benevolent Affections’.
4. The following explication of principle 4 in terms of the system of man’s duties outlines the part of Reid’s Glasgow lectures reconstructed in *Reid on Practical Ethics*.

injured, or ill-treated, they see it, and feel resentment. It is the want of candour that makes men use one measure for the duty they owe to others, and another measure for the duty that others owe to them in like circumstances. That men ought to judge with candour, as in all other cases, so especially in what concerns their moral conduct, is surely self-evident to every intelligent being. The man who takes offence when he is injured in his person, in his property, in his good name, pronounces judgment against himself if he act so toward his neighbour.

As the equity and obligation of this rule of conduct is self-evident to every man who hath a conscience; so it is, of all the rules of morality, the most comprehensive, and truly deserves ‹376› the encomium given it by the highest authority, that *it is the law and the prophets*.[5]

It comprehends every rule of justice without exception. It comprehends all the relative duties, arising either from the more permanent relations of parent and child, of master and servant, of magistrate and subject, of husband and wife, or from the more transient relations of rich and poor, of buyer and seller, of debtor and creditor, of benefactor and beneficiary, of friend and enemy. It comprehends every duty of charity and humanity, and even of courtesy and good manners.

Nay, I think, that, without any force or straining, it extends even to the duties of self-government. For, as every man approves in others the virtues of prudence, temperance, self-command and fortitude, he must perceive, that what is right in others must be right in himself in like circumstances.

To sum up all, he who acts invariably by this rule will never deviate from the path of his duty, but from an error of judgment. And, as he feels the obligation that he and all men are under to use the best means in his power to have his judgment well-informed in matters of duty, his errors will only be such as are invincible.

It may be observed, that this axiom supposes a faculty in man by which he can distinguish right conduct from wrong. It supposes also, that, by this faculty, we easily perceive the right and the wrong in other men that are indifferent to us; but are very apt to be blinded by the partiality of selfish passions when the case concerns ourselves. Every claim we have against others is apt to be magnified by self-love, when viewed directly. A change of persons removes this prejudice, and brings the claim to appear in its just magnitude.

5. Reid quotes Matthew 7:12.

‹377› 5. To every man who believes the existence, the perfections, and the providence of GOD, the veneration and submission we owe to him is self-evident. Right sentiments of the Deity and of his works, not only make the duty we owe to him obvious to every intelligent being, but likewise add the authority of a Divine law to every rule of right conduct.

There is another class of axioms in morals, by which, when there seems to be an opposition between the actions that different virtues lead to, we determine to which the preference is due.

Between the several virtues, as they are dispositions of mind, or determinations of will, to act according to a certain general rule, there can be no opposition. They dwell together most amicably, and give mutual aid and ornament, without the possibility of hostility or opposition, and, taken altogether, make one uniform and consistent rule of conduct. But, between particular external actions, which different virtues would lead to, there may be an opposition. Thus, the same man may be in his heart, generous, grateful and just. These dispositions strengthen, but never can weaken one another. Yet it may happen, that an external action which generosity or gratitude solicits, justice may forbid.

That in all such cases, unmerited generosity should yield to gratitude, and both to justice, is self-evident. Nor is it less so, that unmerited beneficence to those who are at ease should yield to compassion to the miserable, and external acts of piety to works of mercy, because GOD loves mercy more than sacrifice.

At the same time, we perceive, that those acts of virtue which ought to yield in the case of a competition, have most intrinsic worth when there is no competition. Thus, it is evident that there is more worth in pure and unmerited benevolence than in compassion, more in ‹378› compassion than in gratitude, and more in gratitude than in justice.

I call these *first principles*, because they appear to me to have in themselves an intuitive evidence which I cannot resist. I find I can express them in other words. I can illustrate them by examples and authorities, and perhaps can deduce one of them from another; but I am not able to deduce them from other principles that are more evident. And I find the best moral reasonings of authors I am acquainted with, ancient and modern, Heathen and Christian, to be grounded upon one or more of them.

The evidence of mathematical axioms is not discerned till men come to a certain degree of maturity of understanding. A boy must have formed the general conception of *quantity*, and of *more* and *less* and *equal*,

of *sum* and *difference*; and he must have been accustomed to judge of these relations in matters of common life, before he can perceive the evidence of the mathematical axiom, that equal quantities, added to equal quantities, make equal sums.

In like manner, our moral judgment, or conscience, grows to maturity from an imperceptible seed, planted by our Creator. When we are capable of contemplating the actions of other men, or of reflecting upon our own calmly and dispassionately, we begin to perceive in them the qualities of honest and dishonest, of honourable and base, of right and wrong, and to feel the sentiments of moral approbation and disapprobation.

These sentiments are at first feeble, easily warped by passions and prejudices, and apt to yield to authority. By use and time, the judgment, in morals as in other matters, gathers strength, and feels more vigour. We begin to distinguish the dictates of passion from those of cool reason, and to perceive, that it is not ‹379› always safe to rely upon the judgment of others. By an impulse of nature, we venture to judge for ourselves, as we venture to walk by ourselves.

There is a strong analogy between the progress of the body from infancy to maturity, and the progress of all the powers of the mind. This progression in both is the work of nature, and in both may be greatly aided or hurt by proper education. It is natural to a man to be able to walk or run or leap; but if his limbs had been kept in fetters from his birth, he would have none of those powers. It is no less natural to a man trained in society, and accustomed to judge of his own actions and those of other men, to perceive a right and a wrong, an honourable and a base, in human conduct; and to such a man, I think, the principles of morals I have above mentioned will appear self-evident. Yet there may be individuals of the human species so little accustomed to think or judge of any thing, but of gratifying their animal appetites, as to have hardly any conception of right or wrong in conduct, or any moral judgment; as there certainly are some who have not the conceptions and the judgment necessary to understand the axioms of geometry.

From the principles above mentioned, the whole system of moral conduct follows so easily, and with so little aid of reasoning, that every man of common understanding, who wishes to know his duty, may know it. The path of duty is a plain path, which the upright in heart can rarely mistake. Such it must be, since every man is bound to walk in it. There are some intricate cases in morals which admit of disputation; but these seldom occur in practice; and, when they do, the learned disputant has

no great advantage: For the unlearned man, who uses the best means in his power to know his duty, and acts according to his knowledge, is inculpable in the sight of GOD and man. He may err, but he is not guilty of immorality.

‹380›

CHAP. II.

Of Systems of Morals.

IF the knowledge of our duty be so level to the apprehension of all men, as has been represented in the last chapter, it may seem hardly to deserve the name of a science. It may seem that there is no need for instruction in morals.

From what cause then has it happened, that we have many large and learned systems of moral philosophy, and systems of natural juris - prudence, or the law of nature and nations; and that, in modern times, public professions have been instituted in most places of education for instructing youth in these branches of knowledge?[6]

This event, I think, may be accounted for, and the utility of such systems and professions justified, without supposing any difficulty or intricacy in the knowledge of our duty.

I am far from thinking instruction in morals unnecessary. Men may, to the end of life, be ignorant of self-evident truths. They may, to the end of life, entertain gross absurdities. Experience shews that this happens often in matters that are indifferent. Much more may it happen in matters where interest, passion, prejudice and fashion, are so apt to pervert the judgment.

The most obvious truths are not perceived without some ripeness

6. In his lectures, Reid presented the main ancient and modern 'systems'. Concerning *theories of virtue*, he saw three main systems, that of self-interest, where he differentiates between true and false self-interest (as in the present work); that of benevolence, which only Hutcheson had turned from religious mysticism into reasoned philosophy; and that of agreeableness to reason, of which he takes Balguy and Price to be the most 'accurate' representatives. See 8/III/3, 11–14. For another classification of systems of virtue, see 7/V/18, 1. Concerning *theories of the moral faculty*, the main dividing line was that between systems of 'feelings or affections … or Sympathy' or 'sentiment', on one hand, and 'reason' on the other. See 8/III/3, 13, with insertion of 8/III/4, 8/III/15 and 8/III/7, 1–7.

of judgment. For we see, that children may be made to believe any thing, though ever so absurd. Our judgment of things is ripened, not by time only, but chiefly by being exercised about things of the same or of a similar kind.

Judgment, even in things self-evident, requires a clear, di ‹381›stinct and steady conception of the things about which we judge. Our con - ceptions are at first obscure and wavering. The habit of attending to them is necessary to make them distinct and steady; and this habit requires an exertion of mind to which many of our animal principles are unfriendly. The love of truth calls for it; but its still voice is often drowned by the louder call of some passion, or we are hindered from listening to it by laziness and desultoriness. Thus men often remain through life ignorant of things which they needed but to open their eyes to see, and which they would have seen if their attention had been turned to them.

The most knowing derive the greatest part of their knowledge, even in things obvious, from instruction and information, and from being taught to exercise their natural faculties, which, without instruction, would lie dormant.

I am very apt to think, that, if a man could be reared from infancy, without any society of his fellow-creatures, he would hardly ever shew any sign, either of moral judgment, or of the power of reasoning. His own actions would be directed by his animal appetites and passions, without cool reflection, and he would have no access to improve, by observing the conduct of other beings like himself.

The power of vegetation in the seed of a plant, without heat and moisture, would for ever lie dormant. The rational and moral powers of man would perhaps lie dormant without instruction and example. Yet these powers are a part, and the noblest part, of his constitution; as the power of vegetation is of the seed.

Our first moral conceptions are probably got by attending coolly to the conduct of others, and observing what moves our approbation, what our indignation. These sentiments spring ‹382› from our moral faculty as naturally as the sensations of sweet and bitter from the faculty of taste. They have their natural objects. But most human actions are of a mixed nature, and have various colours, according as they are viewed on differ- ent sides. Prejudice against, or in favour of the person, is apt to warp our opinion. It requires attention and candour to distinguish the good from the ill, and, without favour or prejudice, to form a clear and impartial judgment. In this we may be greatly aided by instruction.

He must be very ignorant of human nature, who does not perceive that the seed of virtue in the mind of man, like that of a tender plant in an unkindly soil, requires care and culture in the first period of life, as well as our own exertion when we come to maturity.

If the irregularities of passion and appetite be timely checked, and good habits planted; if we be excited by good examples, and bad examples be shewn in their proper colour; if the attention be prudently directed to the precepts of wisdom and virtue, as the mind is capable of receiving them; a man thus trained will rarely be at a loss to distinguish good from ill, in his own conduct, without the labour of reasoning.

The bulk of mankind have but little of this culture in the proper season; and what they have is often unskilfully applied; by which means bad habits gather strength, and false notions of pleasure, of honour, and of interest, occupy the mind. They give little attention to what is right and honest. Conscience is seldom consulted, and so little exercised, that its decisions are weak and wavering. Although, therefore, to a ripe understanding, free from prejudice, and accustomed to judge of the morality of actions, most truths in morals will appear self-evident, it does not follow that moral instruction is unnecessary in the first ‹383› part of life, or that it may not be very profitable in its more advanced period.

The history of past ages shews that nations, highly civilized and greatly enlightened in many arts and sciences, may, for ages, not only hold the grossest absurdities with regard to the Deity and his worship, but with regard to the duty we owe to our fellow-men, particularly to children, to servants, to strangers, to enemies, and to those who differ from us in religious opinions.

Such corruptions in religion, and in morals, had spread so wide among mankind, and were so confirmed by custom, as to require a light from heaven to correct them. Revelation was not intended to supersede, but to aid the use of our natural faculties; and I doubt not, but the attention given to moral truths, in such systems as we have mentioned, has contributed much to correct the errors and prejudices of former ages, and may continue to have the same good effect in time to come.

It needs not seem strange, that systems of morals may swell to great magnitude, if we consider that, although the general principles be few and simple, their application extends to every part of human conduct, in every condition, every relation, and every transaction of life. They are the rule of life to the magistrate and to the subject, to the master and to the servant, to the parent and to the child, to the fellow-citizen and to the alien, to the

friend and to the enemy, to the buyer and to the seller, to the borrower and to the lender. Every human creature is subject to their authority in his actions and words, and even in his thoughts. They may, in this respect, be compared to the laws of motion in the natural world, which, though few and simple, serve to regulate an infinite variety of operations throughout the universe.

And as the beauty of the laws of motion is displayed in the‹384› most striking manner, when we trace them through all the variety of their effects; so the divine beauty and sanctity of the principles of morals, appear most august when we take a comprehensive view of their application to every condition and relation, and to every transaction of human society.

This is, or ought to be, the design of systems of morals. They may be made more or less extensive, having no limits fixed by nature, but the wide circle of human transactions. When the principles are applied to these in detail, the detail is pleasant and profitable. It requires no profound reasoning, (excepting, perhaps, in a few disputable points.) It admits of the most agreeable illustration from examples and authorities; it serves to exercise, and thereby to strengthen moral judgment. And one who has given much attention to the duty of man, in all the various relations and circumstances of life, will probably be more enlightened in his own duty, and more able to enlighten others.

The first writers in morals, we are acquainted with, delivered their moral instructions, not in systems, but in short unconnected sentences, or aphorisms. They saw no need for deductions of reasoning, because the truths they delivered could not but be admitted by the candid and attentive.

Subsequent writers, to improve the way of treating this subject, gave method and arrangement to moral truths, by reducing them under certain divisions and subdivisions, as parts of one whole. By these means the whole is more easily comprehended and remembered, and from this arrangement gets the name of a system and of a science.

A system of morals is not like a system of geometry, where the subsequent parts derive their evidence from the preceding, and one chain of reasoning is carried on from the beginning; so that, if the arrangement is changed, the chain is broken, and ‹385› the evidence is lost. It resembles more a system of botany, or mineralogy, where the subsequent parts depend not for their evidence upon the preceding, and the arrangement is made to facilitate apprehension and memory, and not to give evidence.

Morals have been methodised in different ways. The ancients commonly arranged them under the four cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. Christian writers, I think more properly, under the three heads of the duty we owe to GOD, to ourselves, and to our neighbour. One division may be more comprehensive, or more natural, than another; but the truths arranged are the same, and their evidence the same in all.[7]

I shall only farther observe, with regard to systems of morals, that they have been made more voluminous, and more intricate, partly by mixing political questions with morals, which I think improper, because they belong to a different science, and are grounded on different principles; partly by making what is commonly, but I think improperly, called the *Theory of Morals*, a part of the system.[8]

By the theory of morals is meant a just account of the structure of our moral powers; that is, of those powers of the mind by which we have our moral conceptions, and distinguish right from wrong in human actions. This, indeed, is an intricate subject, and there have been various theories and much controversy about it in ancient and in modern times. But it has little connection with the knowledge of our duty; and those who differ

7. Reid used the threefold Christian duties and the fourfold classical virtues to structure the 'practical ethics' part of his lectures on moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow. This can be followed in detail in the reconstruction of his course in *Practical Ethics*: see the Introduction, pp. lvi ff.
8. Reid wanted to distinguish sharply between the three disciplines of pneumatology, ethics and politics. Pneumatology was the general theory of mind – human as well as divine – and encompassed 'the theory of morals', by which he understood what today is called moral psychology and epistemology. Ethics was also called practical ethics to indicate that it was a system of the duties that structure humanity's moral life, including its social and political duties, and its main part was in fact Reid's version of natural jurisprudence. Politics was practical insight (or prudence) concerning causal connections in social and political matters and should serve to guide political action in the same way that medicine guides a doctor. Cf. Preface to *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, pp. 11–15; Introductory Lecture in *Practical Ethics*; Introductory Lecture in *Society and Politics*; above Essay III, Part III, Chap. 6; and this Essay, Chaps. 3–4. Those who mix practical ethics and politics appear to be most of the ancient and modern theorists, but Machiavelli and Harrington are explicitly excepted (MS 4/III/3, 7, in *Society and Politics*). Reid does not specify those accused of confusing the theoretical and practical parts of ethics, but they would appear to be all the modern representatives of sentimentalist moral theory who, in his eyes, reduced moral judgment to a purely perceptual model. The general discussion of theory versus practical morals in the 1765 lectures is at 8/III/3, 4–5.

most in the theory of our moral powers, agree in the practical rules of morals which they dictate.[9]

As a man may be a good judge of colours, and of the other visible qualities of objects, without any knowledge of the anatomy of the eye, and of the theory of vision; so a man may have ‹386› a very clear and comprehensive knowledge of what is right and what is wrong in human conduct, who never studied the structure of our moral powers.

A good ear in music may be much improved by attention and practice in that art; but very little by studying the anatomy of the ear, and the theory of sound. In order to acquire a good eye or a good ear in the arts that require them, the theory of vision and the theory of sound, are by no means necessary, and indeed of very little use. Of as little necessity or use is what we call the theory of morals, in order to improve our moral judgment.

I mean not to depreciate this branch of knowledge. It is a very important part of the philosophy of the human mind, and ought to be considered as such, but not as any part of morals. By the name we give to it, and by the custom of making it a part of every system of morals, men may be led into this gross mistake, which I wish to obviate, That in order to understand his duty, a man must needs be a philosopher and a metaphysician.

‹387›

CHAP. III.

Of Systems of Natural Jurisprudence.

SYSTEMS of natural jurisprudence, of the rights of peace and war, or of the law of nature and nations, are a modern invention, which soon acquired such reputation, as gave occasion to many public establishments for teaching it along with the other sciences. It has so close a relation to morals, that it may answer the purpose of a system of morals, and is

9. This was not a standpoint that Reid consistently adhered to, for it depended on which moral theory was in question, as he said in a debating question for one of his learned societies. While Mandeville's and the Epicureans' theoretical systems had lamentable effects, those of the Stoics and Peripatetics were a different matter. See 7/V/21. In his 1765 lectures he pointed out to his students that the theories of morals in Hume and Smith had unhealthy tendencies. See 8/III/3, 16, continued in 8/III/2, 1.

commonly put in the place of it, as far, at least, as concerns our duty to our fellow-men. They differ in the name and form, but agree in substance. This will appear from a slight attention to the nature of both.

The direct intention of morals is to teach the duty of men: that of natural jurisprudence, to teach the rights of men. [10] Right and duty are things very different, and have even a kind of opposition; yet they are so related, that the one cannot even be conceived without the other; and he that understands the one must understand the other.

They have the same relation which credit has to debt. As all credit supposes an equivalent debt; so all right supposes a corresponding duty. There can be no credit in one party without an equivalent debt in another party; and there can be no right in one party, without a corresponding duty in another party. The sum of credit shews the sum of debt; and the sum of mens rights shews, in like manner, the sum of their duty to one another.

The word *right* has a very different meaning, according as it is applied to actions or to persons. A right action is an action‹388› agreeable to our duty. But when we speak of the rights of men, the word has a very different and a more artificial meaning. It is a term of art in law, and signifies all that a man may lawfully do, all that he may lawfully possess and use, and all that he may lawfully claim of any other person.

This comprehensive meaning of the word *right*, and of the Latin word *jus*, which corresponds to it, though long adopted into common language, is too artificial to be the birth of common language. It is a term of art, contrived by Civilians when the civil law became a profession.[11]

The whole end and object of law is to protect the subjects in all that they may lawfully do, or possess, or demand. This threefold object of law, Civilians have comprehended under the word *jus* or *right*, which they define, *Facultas aliquid agendi*, *vel possidendi*, *vel ab alio consequendi*: A lawful claim to do any thing, to possess any thing, or to demand some prestation from some other person. [12] The first of these may be called the right of *liberty*, the second that of *property*, which is also called a *real right*, the third is called *personal right*, because it respects some

10. In his lectures, Reid dealt at length with natural jurisprudence. These lectures are reconstructed in *Reid on Practical Ethics*.
11. By civilians Reid means theorists and practitioners of Roman law.
12. The classical source for the tripartite division of law is Justinian's *Institutes* I.ii.12 and *Digest* I.v.1, but the particular Latin formulation here is borrowed from Francis Hutcheson's Latin textbook, which Reid used for his lectures on practical ethics. See Hutcheson, *Philosophiae moralis institutio / Short Introduction*, p. 111.

particular person or persons of whom the prestation may be demanded.

We can be at no loss to perceive the duties corresponding to the several kinds of rights. What I have a right to do, it is the duty of all men not to hinder me from doing. What is my property or real right, no man ought to take from me; or to molest me in the use and enjoyment of it. And what I have a right to demand of any man, it is his duty to perform. Between the right, on the one hand, and the duty, on the other, there is not only a necessary connection, but, in reality, they are only different expressions of the same meaning; just as it is the same thing to say I am your debtor, and to say you are my creditor; or as it is the same thing to say I am your father, and to say you are my son.

‹389› Thus we see, that there is such a correspondence between the rights of men and the duties of men, that the one points out the other; and a system of the one may be substituted for a system of the other.

But here an objection occurs. It may be said, That although every right implies a duty, yet every duty does not imply a right. Thus, it may be my duty to do a humane or kind office to a man who has no claim of right to it; and therefore a system of the rights of men, though it teach all the duties of strict justice, yet it leaves out all the duties of charity and humanity, without which the system of morals must be very lame.

In answer to this objection, it may be observed, That, as there is a strict notion of justice, in which it is distinguished from humanity and charity, so there is a more extensive signification of it, in which it includes those virtues. The ancient moralists, both Greek and Roman, under the cardinal virtue of justice, included beneficence; and, in this extensive sense, it is often used in common language. The like may be said of right, which, in a sense not uncommon, is extended to every proper claim of humanity and charity, as well as to the claims of strict justice. But, as it is proper to distinguish these two kinds of claims by different names, writers in natural jurisprudence have given the name of *perfect* rights to the claims of strict justice, and that of *imperfect* rights to the claims of charity and humanity. Thus, all the duties of humanity have imperfect rights corresponding to them, as those of strict justice have perfect rights.[13]

Another objection may be, That there is still a class of duties to which no right, perfect or imperfect, corresponds.

We are bound in duty to pay due respect, not only to what is truly the

13. This paragraph sums up a central debate that was begun in Protestant natural law by Hugo Grotius, *De iure belli ac pacis* , Book I, Chap. 1, Sections iv–viii. Cf. *Practical Ethics*, p. 197, note 25, and note 17 below in this chapter.

right of another, but to what, through ignorance or ‹390› mistake, we believe to be his right. Thus, if my neighbour is possessed of a horse which he stole, and to which he has no right; while I believe the horse to be really his, and am ignorant of the theft, it is my duty to pay the same respect to this conceived right as if it were real. Here, then, is a moral obligation on one party, without any corresponding right on the other.

To supply this defect in the system of rights, so as to make right and duty correspond in every instance, writers in jurisprudence have had recourse to something like what is called a fiction of law. They give the name of *right* to the claim which even the thief hath to the goods he has stolen, while the theft is unknown, and to all similar claims grounded on the ignorance or mistake of the parties concerned. And to distinguish this kind of right from genuine rights, perfect or imperfect, they call it an *external* right.[14]

Thus it appears, That although a system of the perfect rights of men, or the rights of strict justice, would be a lame substitute for a system of human duty; yet when we add to it the imperfect and the external rights, it comprehends the whole duty we owe to our fellow-men.

But it may be asked, Why should men be taught their duty in this indirect way, by reflection, as it were, from the rights of other men?

Perhaps it may be thought, that this indirect way may be more agreeable to the pride of man, as we see that men of rank like better to hear of obligations of honour than of obligations of duty (although the dictates of true honour and of duty be the same); for this reason that honour puts a man in mind of what he owes to himself, whereas duty is a more humiliating idea. For a like reason, men may attend more willingly to their ‹391› rights, which put them in mind of their dignity, than to their duties, which suggest their dependence. And we see that men may give great attention to their rights who give but little to their duty.

Whatever truth there may be in this, I believe better reasons can be given why systems of natural jurisprudence have been contrived and put in the place of systems of morals.

Systems of civil law were invented many ages before we had any system of natural jurisprudence; and the former seem to have suggested the idea of the latter.

Such is the weakness of human understanding, that no large body of

14. Reid's main reference for this topic is Hutcheson, *Philosophiae moralis institutio / Short Introduction*, p. 114, and *System of Moral Philosophy*, II, pp. 259–60. Cf. *Practical Ethics*, p. 260, note 41.

knowledge can be easily apprehended and remembered, unless it be arranged and methodised, that is, reduced into a system. When the laws of the Roman people were multiplied to a great degree, and the study of them became an honourable and lucrative profession, it became necessary that they should be methodised into a system. And the most natural and obvious way of methodising law was found to be according to the divisions and subdivisions of mens rights, which it is the intention of law to protect.

The study of law produced not only systems of law, but a language proper for expressing them. Every art has its terms of art for expressing the conceptions that belong to it; and the Civilian must have terms for expressing accurately the divisions and subdivisions of rights, and the various ways whereby they may be acquired, transferred, or extinguished, in the various transactions of civil society. He must have terms accurately defined, for the various crimes by which mens rights are violated, not to speak of the terms which express the different forms of actions at law, and the various steps of the procedure of judicatories.

‹392› Those who have been bred to any profession are very prone to use the terms of their profession in speaking or writing on subjects that have any analogy to it. And they may do so with advantage, as terms of art are commonly more precise in their signification, and better defined, than the words of common language. To such persons it is also very natural to model and arrange other subjects, as far as their nature admits, into a method similar to that of the system which fills their minds.

It might, therefore, be expected, that a Civilian, intending to give a detailed system of morals, would use many of the terms of civil law, and mould it, as far as it can be done, into the form of a system of law, or of the rights of mankind.

The necessary and close relation of right to duty, which we before observed, justified this: And moral duty had long been considered as a *law of nature*, a law, not wrote on tables of stone or brass, but on the heart of man; a law of greater antiquity and higher authority than the laws of particular states; a law which is binding upon all men of all nations, and therefore is called by CICERO *the law of nature and of nations*.[15]

The idea of a system of this law was worthy of the genius of the immortal HUGO GROTIUS, and he was the first who executed it in such a

15. Cicero identified natural law as the law common to all people in, e.g., *De officiis* III.v; and *De legibus* II.iv.

manner as to draw the attention of the learned in all the European nations; and to give occasion to several princes and states to establish public professions for the teaching of this law.[16]

The multitude of commentators and annotators upon this work of GROTIUS, and the public establishments to which it gave occasion, are sufficient vouchers of its merit.

It is, indeed, a work so well designed, and so skilfully executed; so free from the scholastic jargon which infected the ‹393› learned at that time, so much addressed to the common sense and moral judgment of mankind, and so agreeably illustrated by examples from ancient history, and authorities from the sentiments of ancient authors, Heathen and Christian, that it must always be esteemed as the capital work of a great genius upon a most important subject.

The utility of a just system of natural jurisprudence appears, 1. As it is a system of the moral duty we owe to men, which, by the aid they have taken from the terms and divisions of the civil law, has been given more in detail and more systematically by writers in natural jurisprudence than it was formerly. 2. As it is the best preparation for the study of law, being, as it were, cast in the mould, and using and explaining many of the terms of the civil law, on which the law of most of the European nations is grounded. 3. It is of use to lawgivers, who ought to make their laws as agreeable as possible to the law of nature. And as laws made by men, like all human works, must be imperfect, it points out the errors and imperfections of human laws. 4. To judges and interpreters of the law it is of use, because that interpretation ought to be preferred which is founded in the law of nature. 5. It is of use in civil controversies between states, or between individuals who have no common superior. In such controversies, the appeal must be made to the law of nature; and the standard systems of it, particularly that of GROTIUS, have great authority. And, 6. to say no more upon this point, It is of great use to sovereigns and states who are above all human laws, to be solemnly admonished of the conduct they are bound to observe to their own subjects, to the subjects of other states, and to one another, in peace and in war. The better and the more generally the law of nature is understood, the greater dishonour, in public estimation, will follow every violation of it.

Some authors have imagined, that systems of natural juris -

16. Following Grotius' publication of *De iure belli ac pacis* in 1625, natural jurisprudence flourished in Protestant Europe, and from the late seventeenth century through the eighteenth it was a common academic subject.

pru‹394›dence ought to be confined to the perfect rights of men, because the duties which correspond to the imperfect rights, the duties of charity and humanity cannot be enforced by human laws, but must be left to the judgment and conscience of men, free from compulsion. But the systems which have had the greatest applause of the public, have not followed this plan, and, I conceive, for good reasons.[17] *First*, Because a system of perfect rights could by no means serve the purpose of a system of morals, which surely is an important purpose. *Secondly*, Because, in many cases, it is hardly possible to fix the precise limit between justice and humanity, between perfect and imperfect right. Like the colours in a prismatic image, they run into each other, so that the best eye cannot fix the precise boundary between them. *Thirdly*, As wise legislators and magistrates ought to have it as their end to make the citizens good, as well as just, we find, in all civilized nations, laws that are intended to encourage the duties of humanity. Where human laws cannot enforce them by punishments, they may encourage them by rewards. Of this the wisest legislators have given examples; and how far this branch of legislation may be carried, no man can foresee.

The substance of the four following chapters was wrote long ago, and read in a literary society, with a view to justify some points of morals from metaphysical objections urged against them in the writings of DAVID HUME, Esq.[18] If they answer that end, and, at the same time, serve to illustrate the account I have given of our moral powers, it is hoped that the reader will not think them improperly placed here; and that he will

17. Since Grotius (*De iure belli ac pacis*, I.i.4–8) it had been common to distinguish between justice as a matter of perfect and of imperfect rights, or, especially in Samuel Pufendorf (*Law of Nature* I.vii.8; *Duty of Man* I.ii.14) and his followers, of perfect and imperfect duties. In most cases the distinction was seen as relative, not absolute. The thinker who most clearly defined the discipline of natural jurisprudence as narrowly confined to perfect rights was Adam Smith, but he did so most explicitly in his lectures, which Reid may have known about through the notes of former students of Smith's: see *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, (A)i.14–15; and *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, II.ii.1, §7. Of those who rejected such a restrictive notion, Hutcheson was important to Reid: see *Inquiry*, 2nd Treatise, VII.vi, pp. 183–5; *Philosophiae moralis institutio / Short Introduction*, II.ii.3, pp. 113–14 and II.iv.3–4, pp. 129–32; and *System of Moral Philosophy*, vol. I, pp. 257–9, 293–308.

18. Reid is referring to his contributions to the Aberdeen Philosophical Society in the years before he moved to Glasgow. See H. Lewis Ulman (ed.), *The Minutes of the Aberdeen Philosophical Society 1758–1773*; and cf. notes to each of the following chapters in this Essay.

forgive some repetitions, and perhaps anachronisms, occasioned by their being wrote at different times, and on different occasions.

‹395›

CHAP. IV.

Whether an Action deserving Moral Approbation, must be done with the belief of its being morally good.[19]

THERE is no part of philosophy more subtile and intricate than that which is called *The Theory of Morals.*[20] Nor is there any more plain and level to the apprehension of man than the practical part of morals.

In the former, the Epicurean, the Peripatetic and the Stoic, had each his different system of old; and almost every modern author of reputation has a system of his own.[21] At the same time, there is no branch of human knowledge, in which there is so general an agreement among ancients and moderns, learned and unlearned, as in the practical rules of morals.

From this discord in the theory, and harmony in the practical part, we may judge, that the rules of morality stand upon another and a firmer foundation than the theory. And of this it is easy to perceive the reason.

For, in order to know what is right and what is wrong in human conduct, we need only listen to the dictates of our conscience when the mind is calm and unruffled, or attend to the judgment we form of others in like circumstances. But, to judge of the various theories of morals, we must be able to analyze and dissect, as it were, the active powers of the human mind, and especially to analyze accurately that conscience or moral power by which we discern right from wrong.

The conscience may be compared to the eye in this, as in many ‹396› other respects. The learned and the unlearned see objects with equal distinctness. The former have no title to dictate to the latter, as far as the eye is judge, nor is there any disagreement about such matters. But, to dissect the eye, and to explain the theory of vision, is a difficult point, wherein the most skilful have differed.

19. Reid introduced a debating ‘question’ on this topic in the Aberdeen Philo - sophical Society on 22 November 1763. It appears to be a later revision that is preserved as a densely argued paper (2/II/12 and 7/V/19), which covers much of the ground in the present chapter. There are contributing drafts in 6/I/8, 6/I/25 and 7/V/17. For the discussion in the 1765 lectures, see 8/III/3, 8–10 (mainly).
20. See this Essay, Chap. 2, note 5.
21. See this Essay, Chap. 2, note 1.

From this remarkable disparity between our decisions in the theory of morals and in the rules of morality, we may, I think, draw this conclusion, That wherever we find any disagreement between the practical rules of morality, which have been received in all ages, and the principles of any of the theories advanced upon this subject, the practical rules ought to be the standard by which the theory is to be corrected, and that it is both unsafe and unphilosophical to warp the practical rules, in order to make them tally with a favourite theory.

The question to be considered in this chapter belongs to the practical part of morals, and therefore is capable of a more easy and more certain determination. And, if it be determined in the affirmative, I conceive that it may serve as a touchstone to try some celebrated theories which are inconsistent with that determination, and which have led the theorists to oppose it by very subtile metaphysical arguments.

Every question about what is or is not the proper object of moral approbation, belongs to practical morals, and such is the question now under consideration: Whether actions deserving moral approbation must be done with the belief of their being morally good? Or, Whether an action, done without any regard to duty or to the dictates of conscience, can be entitled to moral approbation?[22]

In every action of a moral agent, his conscience is either altogether silent, or it pronounces the action to be good, or bad,‹397› or indifferent. This, I think, is a complete enumeration. If it be perfectly silent, the action must be very trifling, or appear so. For conscience, in those who have exercised it, is a very pragmatical faculty, and meddles with every part of our conduct, whether we desire its counsel or not. And what a man does in perfect simplicity, without the least suspicion of its being bad, his heart cannot condemn him for, nor will he that knows the heart condemn him. If there was any previous culpable negligence or inattention which led him to a wrong judgment, or hindered his forming a right one, that I do not exculpate. I only consider the action done, and the disposition with

22. It was a Stoic principle that virtue lies only in the determination of choice and action by reason or conscience. In a letter to Hutcheson, Hume claims that Cicero questions this principle in *De finibus*, IV.xvii: *Letters of David Hume* , vol. 1, p. 35. Among those modern philosophers who insist, with Reid, that an action must be done out of regard for duty to count as virtuous are Butler (cf. the dissertation 'Of the Nature of Virtue' appended to *The Analogy of Religion*, and the Introduction and first three sermons of the *Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*) and Price (cf.*Review of the Principal Questions of Morals*, Chap. 8, esp. pp. 181–9).

which it was done, without its previous circumstances. And in this there appears nothing that merits disapprobation. As little can it merit any degree of moral approbation, because there was neither good nor ill intended. And the same may be said when conscience pronounces the action to be indifferent.

If, in the *second* place, I do what my conscience pronounces to be bad or dubious, I am guilty to myself, and justly deserve the disapprobation of others. Nor am I less guilty in this case, though what I judged to be bad should happen to be good or indifferent. I did it believing it to be bad, and this is an immorality.

Lastly, If I do what my conscience pronounces to be right and my duty, either I have some regard to duty, or I have none. The last is not supposable; for I believe there is no man so abandoned, but that he does what he believes to be his duty, with more assurance and alacrity upon that account. The more weight the rectitude of the action has in determining me to do it, the more I approve of my own conduct. And if my worldly interest, my appetites or inclinations draw me strongly the contrary way, my following the dictates of my conscience, in opposition to these motives, adds to the moral worth of the action.

‹398› When a man acts from an erroneous judgment, if his error be invincible, all agree that he is inculpable: But if his error be owing to some previous negligence or inattention, there seems to be some difference among moralists. This difference, however, is only seeming, and not real. For wherein lies the fault in this case? It must be granted by all, that the fault lies in this, and solely in this, that he was not at due pains to have his judgment well informed. Those moralists, therefore, who consider the action and the previous conduct that led to it as one whole, find something to blame in the whole; and they do so most justly. But those who take this whole to pieces, and consider what is blameable and what is right in each part, find all that is blameable in what preceded this wrong judgment, and nothing but what is approvable in what followed it.[23]

Let us suppose, for instance, that a man believes that GOD has indispensably required him to observe a very rigorous fast in Lent; and that, from a regard to this supposed Divine command, he fasts in such manner

23. Among those who, like Reid, considered motive and action inherently connected as the object of moral judgment were Joseph Butler and Richard Price (see note 22, above). Among those who analytically separated motive and action, Reid is likely to have thought of Smith (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I.i.3, §§ 5–7) in addition to Hume (see the following).

as is not only a great mortification to his appetite, but even hurtful to his health.

His superstitious opinion may be the effect of a culpable negligence, for which he can by no means be justified. Let him, therefore, bear all the blame upon this account that he deserves. But now, having this opinion fixed in his mind, shall he act according to it or against it? Surely we cannot hesitate a moment in this case. It is evident, that, in following the light of his judgment, he acts the part of a good and pious man; whereas, in acting contrary to his judgment, he would be guilty of wilful disobedience to his Maker.

If my servant, by mistaking my orders, does the contrary of what I commanded, believing, at the same time, that he obeys my orders, there may be some fault in his mistake, but to charge‹399› him with the crime of disobedience, would be inhuman and unjust.

These determinations appear to me to have intuitive evidence, no less than that of mathematical axioms. A man who is come to years of understanding, and who has exercised his faculties in judging of right and wrong, sees their truth as he sees day-light. Metaphysical arguments brought against them have the same effect as when brought against the evidence of sense; they may puzzle and confound, but they do not convince. It appears evident, therefore, that those actions only can truly be called virtuous, or deserving of moral approbation, which the agent believed to be right, and to which he was influenced, more or less, by that belief.

If it should be objected, That this principle makes it to be of no consequence to a man's morals, what his opinions may be, providing he acts agreeably to them, the answer is easy.

Morality requires, not only that a man should act according to his judgment, but that he should use the best means in his power that his judgment be according to truth. If he fail in either of these points, he is worthy of blame; but, if he fail in neither, I see not wherein he can be blamed.

When a man must act, and has no longer time to deliberate, he ought to act according to the light of his conscience, even when he is in an error. But, when he has time to deliberate, he ought surely to use all the means in his power to be rightly informed. When he has done so, he may still be in an error; but it is an invincible error, and cannot justly be imputed to him as a fault.

A *second* objection is, That we immediately approve of benevolence,

gratitude, and other primary virtues, without enquiring ‹400› whether they are practised from a persuasion that they are our duty. And the laws of GOD place the sum of virtue in loving GOD and our neighbour, without any provision that we do it from a persuasion that we ought to do so.[24]

The answer to this objection is, That the love of GOD, the love of our neighbour, justice, gratitude, and other primary virtues, are, by the constitution of human nature, necessarily accompanied with a conviction of their being morally good. We may therefore safely presume, that these things are never disjoined, and that every man who practises these virtues does it with a good conscience. In judging of mens conduct, we do not suppose things which cannot happen, nor do the laws of GOD give decisions upon impossible cases, as they must have done, if they supposed the case of a man who thought it contrary to his duty to love GOD or to love mankind.

But if we wish to know how the laws of GOD determine the point in question, we ought to observe their decision with regard to such actions as may appear good to one man and ill to another. And here the decisions of scripture are clear: *Let every man be persuaded in his own mind. He that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. To him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, it is unclean.* The scripture often placeth the sum of virtue in *living in all good conscience*, in acting so *that our hearts condemn us not*.[25]

The last objection I shall mention is a metaphysical one urged by Mr HUME.

It is a favourite point in his system of morals, That justice is not a natural but an artificial virtue.[26] To prove this, he has exerted the whole strength of his reason and eloquence. And as the principle we are considering stood in his way, he takes pains to refute it.

‹401› ‘Suppose,’ says he, ‘a person to have lent me a sum of money, on condition that it be restored in a few days. After the expiration of the term he demands the sum. I ask, what reason or motive have I to restore

24. Hutcheson develops such a view in Section V of *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*, entitled ‘Shewing that irtue may have whatever is meant by Merit; and be rewardable upon the Supposition, that it is perceived by a Sense, and elected from Affection or Instinct’.
25. Reid has combined Romans 14:5, 14:23, 14:14, Acts 23:1 and 1 John 3:20.
26. See *Treatise*, 3.2–3. The distinction is dismissed as ‘merely verbal’ in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*: see Appendix 3.9 fn: SBN 308.

the money? It will perhaps be said, That my regard to justice and abhorrence of villany and knavery are sufficient reasons for me.' And this, he acknowledges, would be a satisfactory answer to a man in his civilized state, and when trained up according to a certain discipline and education. 'But in his rude and more natural condition,' says he, 'if you are pleased to call such a condition natural, this answer would be rejected as perfectly unintelligible and sophistical.

'For wherein consists this honesty and justice? Not surely in the external action. It must, therefore, consist in the motive from which the external action is derived. This motive can never be a regard to the honesty of the action.For it is a plain fallacy to say,That a virtuous motive is requisite to render an action honest, and, at the same time, that a regard to the honesty is the motive to the action. We can never have a regard to the virtue of an action, unless the action be antecedently virtuous.'

And, in another place, 'To suppose that the mere regard to the virtue of the action is that which rendered it virtuous, is to reason in a circle. An action must be virtuous, before we can have a regard to its virtue. Some virtuous motive, therefore, must be antecedent to that regard. Nor is this merely a metaphysical subtilty,' *&c. Treatise of Hum. Nature, book* 3. *part* 2. *sect.* I.[27]

I am not to consider at this time, how this reasoning is applied to support the author's opinion, That justice is not a natural but an artificial virtue. I consider it only as far as it opposes the principle I have been endeavouring to establish, That, ‹402› to render an action truly virtuous, the agent must have some regard to its rectitude. And I conceive the whole force of the reasoning amounts to this:

When we judge an action to be good or bad, it must have been so in its own nature antecedent to that judgment, otherwise the judgment is erroneous. If, therefore, the action be good in its nature, the judgment of the agent cannot make it bad, nor can his judgment make it good if, in its nature, it be bad. For this would be to ascribe to our judgment a strange magical power to transform the nature of things, and to say, that my judging a thing to be what it is not, makes it really to be what I erroneously judge it to be. This, I think, is the objection in its full strength. And, in answer to it,

First, If we could not loose this metaphysical knot, I think we might

27. The first three passages are quoted with relatively minor inaccuracies from *Treatise*, 3.2.1.9: SBN 479–80; the fourth passage is pieced together from 3.2.1.3–4: SBN 478.

fairly and honestly cut it, because it fixes an absurdity upon the clearest and most indisputable principles of morals and of common sense. For I appeal to any man whether there be any principle of morality, or any principle of common sense, more clear and indisputable than that which we just now quoted from the Apostle PAUL, That although a thing be not unclean in itself, yet to him that esteemeth it to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But the metaphysical argument makes this absurd. For, says the metaphysician, If the thing was not unclean in itself, you judged wrong in esteeming it to be unclean; and what can be more absurd, than that your esteeming a thing to be what it is not, should make it what you erroneously esteem it to be?

Let us try the edge of this argument in another instance. Nothing is more evident, than that an action does not merit the name of benevolent, unless it be done from a belief that it tends to promote the good of our neighbour. But this is absurd, says the metaphysician. For, if it be not a benevolent ‹403› action in itself, your belief of its tendency cannot change its nature. It is absurd, that your erroneous belief should make the action to be what you believe it to be. Nothing is more evident, than that a man who tells the truth, believing it to be a lie, is guilty of falsehood; but the metaphysician would make this to be absurd.

In a word, if there be any strength in this argument, it would follow, That a man might be, in the highest degree, virtuous, without the least regard to virtue; that he might be very benevolent, without ever intending to do a good office; very malicious, without ever intending any hurt; very revengeful, without ever intending to retaliate an injury; very grateful, without ever intending to return a benefit; and a man of strict veracity, with an intention to lie. We might, therefore, reject this reasoning, as repugnant to self-evident truths, though we were not able to point out the fallacy of it.

2.[28] But let us try, in the *second* place, whether the fallacy of this argument may not be discovered.

We ascribe moral goodness to actions considered abstractly, without any relation to the agent. We likewise ascribe moral goodness to an agent on account of an action he has done; we call it a good action, though, in this case, the goodness is properly in the man, and is only by a figure ascribed to the action. Now, it is to be considered, whether *moral goodness*, when applied to an action considered abstractly, has the same

28. There is no numeral 1 at Reid's first point.

meaning as when we apply it to a man on account of that action; or whether we do not unawares change the meaning of the word, according as we apply it to the one or the other.

The action, considered abstractly, has neither understanding nor will; it is not accountable, nor can it be under any moral obligation. But all these things are essential to that moral good ‹404›ness which belongs to a man; for, if a man had not understanding and will, he could have no moral goodness. Hence it follows necessarily, that the moral goodness which we ascribe to an action considered abstractly, and that which we ascribe to a person for doing that action, are not the same. The meaning of the word is changed when it is applied to these different subjects.

This will be more evident, when we consider what is meant by the moral goodness which we ascribe to a man for doing an action, and what by the goodness which belongs to the action considered abstractly. A good action in a man is that in which he applied his intellectual powers properly, in order to judge what he ought to do, and acted according to his best judgment. This is all that can be required of a moral agent; and in this his moral goodness, in any good action, consists. But is this the goodness which we ascribe to an action considered abstractly? No, surely. For the action, considered abstractly, is neither endowed with judgment nor with active power; and, therefore, can have none of that goodness which we ascribe to the man for doing it.

But what do we mean by goodness in an action considered abstractly? To me it appears to lie in this, and in this only, That it is an action which ought to be done by those who have the power and opportunity, and the capacity of perceiving their obligation to do it. I would gladly know of any man, what other moral goodness can be in an action considered abstractly. And this goodness is inherent in its nature, and inseparable from it. No opinion or judgment of an agent can in the least alter its nature.

Suppose the action to be that of relieving an innocent person out of great distress. This surely has all the moral goodness that an action considered abstractly can have. Yet it is evident, that an agent, in relieving a person in distress, may have no ‹405› moral goodness, may have great merit, or may have great demerit.

Suppose, *first*, That mice cut the cords which bound the distressed person, and so bring him relief. Is there moral goodness in this act of the mice?

Suppose, *secondly*, That a man maliciously relieves the distressed

person, in order to plunge him into greater distress. In this action, there is surely no moral goodness, but much malice and inhumanity.

If, in the *last* place, we suppose a person, from real sympathy and humanity, to bring relief to the distressed person, with considerable expence or danger to himself; here is an action of real worth, which every heart approves and every tongue praises. But wherein lies the worth? Not in the action considered by itself, which was common to all the three, but in the man who, on this occasion, acted the part which became a good man. He did what his heart approved, and therefore he is approved by GOD and man.

Upon the whole, if we distinguish between that goodness which may be ascribed to an action considered by itself, and that goodness which we ascribe to a man when he puts it in execution, we shall find a key to this metaphysical lock. We admit, that the goodness of an action, considered abstractly, can have no dependence upon the opinion or belief of an agent, any more than the truth of a proposition depends upon our believing it to be true. But, when a man exerts his active power well or ill, there is a moral goodness or turpitude which we figuratively impute to the action, but which is truly and properly imputable to the man only; and this goodness or turpitude depends very much upon the intention of the agent, and the opinion he had of his action.

‹406› This distinction has been understood in all ages by those who gave any attention to morals, though it has been variously expressed. The Greek moralists gave the name of *καθῆκον* to an action good in itself; such an action might be done by the most worthless. But an action done with a right intention, which implies real worth in the agent, they called *κατόρθωμα*. The distinction is explained by CICERO in his Offices. He calls the first *officium medium*, and the second *officium perfectum*, or *rectum*.[29] In the scholastic ages, an action good in itself was said to be *materially* good, and an action done with a right intention was called *formally* good. This last way of expressing the distinction is still familiar

29. See Cicero, *De officiis* I.iii (8), p. 11: 'And yet there is still another classification of duties: we distinguish between "mean" duty ‹officium medium›, so called, and "absolute" duty ‹officium perfectum›. Absolute duty, we may, I presume call "right" ‹rectum›, for the Greeks call it *καθηκον*, while the ordinary duty they call *κατόρθωμα*. And the meaning of those terms they fix thus: whatever is right they define as "absolute" duty, but "mean" duty, they say, is duty for the performance of which an adequate reason may be rendered.' See also *De officiis* III.iii (14–15), where Cicero points out that these concepts are Stoic.

among Theologians; but Mr HUME seems not to have attended to it, or to have thought it to be words without any meaning.[30]

Mr HUME, in the section already quoted, tells us with great assurance, 'In short, it may be established as an undoubted maxim, that no action can be virtuous or morally good, unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it, distinct from the sense of its morality.'[31] And upon this maxim he founds many of his reasonings on the subject of morals.

Whether it be consistent with Mr HUME'S own system, that an action may be produced merely from the sense of its morality, without any motive of agreeableness or utility, I shall not now enquire. But, if it be true, and I think it evident to every man of common understanding, that a judge or an arbiter acts the most virtuous part when his sentence is produced by no other motive but a regard to justice and a good conscience; nay, when all other motives distinct from this are on the other side: If this I say be true, then that undoubted maxim of Mr HUME must be false, and all the conclusions built upon it must fall to the ground.

From the principle I have endeavoured to establish, I think‹407› some consequences may be drawn with regard to the theory of morals.

First, If there be no virtue without the belief that what we do is right, it follows, That a moral faculty, that is, a power of discerning moral goodness and turpitude in human conduct, is essential to every being capable of virtue or vice. A being who has no more conception of moral goodness and baseness, of right and wrong, than a blind man hath of colours, can have no regard to it in his conduct, and therefore can neither be virtuous nor vicious.

He may have qualities that are agreeable or disagreeable, useful or hurtful; so may a plant or a machine. And we sometimes use the word *virtue* in such a latitude as to signify any agreeable or useful quality, as when we speak of the virtues of plants. But we are now speaking of virtue in the strict and proper sense, as it signifies that quality in a man which is the object of moral approbation.

This virtue a man could not have, if he had not a power of discerning

30. The scholastic distinction between formal and material good was commonly accepted in reformed theology and in Scottish moral philosophy; e.g. Carmichael, *Natural Rights*, p. 25; Hutcheson, *Philosophiae moralis institutio / Short Introduction*, p. 116, and *System* I, pp. 252–3; David Fordyce, *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, pp. 55–6.

31. *Treatise*, 3.2.1.7: SBN 479.

a right and a wrong in human conduct, and of being influenced by that discernment. For in so far only he is virtuous as he is guided in his conduct by that part of his constitution. Brutes do not appear to have such power, and therefore are not moral or accountable agents. They are capable of culture and discipline, but not of virtuous or criminal conduct. Even human creatures, in infancy and non-age, are not moral agents, because their moral faculty is not yet unfolded. These sentiments are supported by the common sense of mankind, which has always determined, that neither brutes nor infants can be indicted for crimes.

It is of small consequence what name we give to this moral power of the human mind; but it is so important a part of our‹408› constitution, as to deserve an appropriated name. The name of *conscience*, as it is the most common, seems to me as proper as any that has been given it. I find no fault with the name *moral sense*, although I conceive this name has given occasion to some mistakes concerning the nature of our moral power. Modern Philosophers have conceived of the external senses as having no other office but to give us certain sensations, or simple conceptions, which we could not have without them. And this notion has been applied to the moral sense. But it seems to me a mistaken notion in both. By the sense of seeing, I not only have the conception of the different colours, but I perceive one body to be of this colour, another of that. In like manner, by my moral sense, I not only have the conceptions of right and wrong in conduct, but I perceive *this* conduct to be right, *that* to be wrong, and *that* indifferent. All our senses are judging faculties, so also is conscience. Nor is this power only a judge of our own actions and those of others, it is likewise a principle of action in all good men; and so far only can our conduct be denominated virtuous, as it is influenced by this principle.[32]

A *second* consequence from the principle laid down in this chapter is, That the formal nature and essence of that virtue which is the object of moral approbation consists neither in a prudent prosecution of our private interest, nor in benevolent affections towards others, nor in qualities useful or agreeable to ourselves or to others, nor in sympathizing with the passions and affections of others, and in attuning our own conduct to

32. Reid returns to criticism of moral sense theory in Chap. 7 below. There is much preparatory work on this topic in Reid's revisions to his lectures in 1769; see 8/III/5, 1–3 and 8/III/4, 3–16, which contain some of his most elaborate critical discussion of Hutcheson.

the tone of other mens passions; [33] but it consists in living in all good conscience, that is, in using the best means in our power to know our duty, and acting accordingly.

Prudence is a virtue, benevolence is a virtue, fortitude is a virtue; but the essence and formal nature of virtue must lie in something that is common to all these, and to every other virtue. And this I conceive can be nothing else but the rectitude ‹409› of such conduct and turpitude of the contrary, which is discerned by a good man. And so far only he is virtuous as he pursues the former and avoids the latter.

CHAP. V.

Whether Justice be a Natural or an Artificial Virtue.[34]

Mr Hume's philosophy concerning morals was first presented to the world in the third volume of his *Treatise of Human Nature*, in the year 1740; afterwards in his *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, which was first published by itself, and then in several editions of his *Essays and Treatises*.[35]

In these two works on morals the system is the same. A more popular arrangement, great embellishment, and the omission of some meta-physical reasonings, have given a preference in the public esteem to the last; but I find neither any new principles in it, nor any new arguments in support of the system common to both.

In this system, the proper object of moral approbation is not actions or any voluntary exertion, but qualities of mind; that is, natural affections or passions, which are involuntary, a part of the constitution of the man, and common to us with many brute-animals. When we praise or blame any voluntary action, it is only considered as a sign of the natural affection from which it flows, and from which all its merit or demerit is derived.

Moral approbation or disapprobation is not an act of the judgment,

33. From several manuscripts, including his 1765 lectures, we know whom Reid saw as representatives of these systems; see note 1, pp. 271–2.
34. This chapter is related to a debating question which Reid introduced in the Aberdeen Philosophical Society on 22 November 1758. There are two fragmentary drafts of the chapter in 2/II/14 and 6/I/9.
35. The *Enquiry* was first published in 1751. The title *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* was first used in 1753 to bring together several previously published works, including the *Enquiry* in a new edition, but not including the *Treatise*.

which, like all acts of judgment, must be true or false, it is only a certain feeling, which, from the constitution of hu ‹410› man nature, arises upon contemplating certain characters or qualities of mind coolly and impartially.

This feeling, when agreeable, is moral approbation; when disagreeable, disapprobation. The qualities of mind which produce this agreeable feeling are the moral virtues, and those that produce the disagreeable, the vices.

These preliminaries being granted, the question about the foundation of morals is reduced to a simple question of fact, to wit, What are the qualities of mind which produce, in the disinterested observer, the feeling of approbation, or the contrary feeling?

In answer to this question, the author endeavours to prove, by a very copious induction, That all personal merit, all virtue, all that is the object of moral approbation, consists in the qualities of mind which are *agreeable* or *useful* to the person who possesses them, or to others.

The *dulce* and the *utile* is the whole sum of merit in every character, in every quality of mind, and in every action of life. There is no room left for that *honestum* which CICERO thus defines, *Honestum igitur id intelligimus, quod tale est, ut detracta omni utilitate, sine ullis premiis fructibusve, per se ipsum possit jure laudari*.[36]

Among the ancient moralists, the Epicureans were the only sect who denied that there is any such thing as *honestum*, or moral worth, distinct from pleasure. In this Mr HUME's system agrees with theirs. For the addition of utility to pleasure, as a foundation of morals, makes only a verbal, but no real difference. What is useful only has no value in itself, but derives all its merit from the end for which it is useful. That end, in this system, is agreeableness or pleasure. So that, in both systems, pleasure is the only end, the only thing that is good in ‹411› itself, and desirable for its own sake; and virtue derives all its merit from its tendency to produce pleasure.

Agreeableness and utility are not moral conceptions, nor have they any connection with morality. What a man does, merely because it is agreeable, or useful to procure what is agreeable, is not virtue. Therefore the Epicurean system was justly thought by CICERO, and the best

36. Transl. 'By Moral Worth, then, we understand that which is of such a nature that, although devoid of all utility, it can justly be commended in and for itself, apart from any profit or reward': Cicero, *De finibus*, II.xiv (45), p. 133.

moralists among the ancients, to subvert morality, and to substitute another principle in its room; and this system is liable to the same censure.[37]

In one thing, however, it differs remarkably from that of EPICURUS. It allows, that there are disinterested affections in human nature; that the love of children and relations, friendship, gratitude, compassion and humanity, are not, as EPICURUS maintained, different modifications of self-love, but simple and original parts of the human constitution; that when interest, or envy, or revenge, pervert not our disposition, we are inclined, from natural philanthropy, to desire, and to be pleased with the happiness of the human kind.[38]

All this, in opposition to the Epicurean system, Mr HUME maintains with great strength of reason and eloquence, and, in this respect, his system is more liberal and disinterested than that of the Greek Philosopher. According to EPICURUS, virtue is whatever is agreeable to ourselves. According to Mr HUME, every quality of mind that is agreeable or useful to ourselves or to others.

This theory of the nature of virtue, it must be acknowledged, enlarges greatly the catalogue of moral virtues, by bringing into that catalogue every quality of mind that is useful or agreeable. Nor does there appear any good reason why the useful and agreeable qualities of body and of fortune, as well as those of the mind, should not have a place among moral virtues in ‹412› this system. They have the essence of virtue; that is, agreeableness and utility, why then should they not have the name?[39]

But, to compensate this addition to the moral virtues, one class of them seems to be greatly degraded and deprived of all intrinsic merit. The useful virtues, as was above observed, are only ministering servants of the agreeable, and purveyors for them; they must, therefore, be so far inferior in dignity, as hardly to deserve the same name.

Mr HUME, however, gives the name of *virtue* to both; and to

37. Epicureanism is extensively expounded in Book I of *De finibus* and comprehensively criticized in Book II; cf. also *De officiis*, III.xxxiii (116–20).

38. In a reading note, Reid also ascribed these Epicurean points to Archibald Campbell's *Enquiry into the Original of Moral Virtue*, 7.V.3, 2. Reid is referring primarily to Hume's idea of the natural virtues as expounded in *Treatise* 3.3, and perhaps as pursued in a different key in the *Enquiry*'s analysis of benevolence and cognate virtues (especially Section 2) as the basis for rejecting systems of self-love (Appendix 2).

39. Hume makes this point himself in *Treatise* 3.3.4–5.

distinguish them, calls the agreeable qualities *natural* virtues, and the useful *artificial*.[40]

The natural virtues are those natural affections of the human constitution which give immediate pleasure in their exercise. Such are all the benevolent affections. Nature disposes to them, and from their own nature they are agreeable, both when we exercise them ourselves, and when we contemplate their exercise in others.

The artificial virtues are such as are esteemed solely on account of their utility, either to promote the good of society, as justice, fidelity, honour, veracity, allegiance, chastity; or on account of their utility to the possessor, as industry, discretion, frugality, secrecy, order, perseverance, forethought, judgment, and others, of which, he says, many pages could not contain the catalogue.

This general view of Mr HUME's system concerning the foundation of morals, seemed necessary, in order to understand distinctly the meaning of that principle of his, which is to be the subject of this chapter, and on which he has bestowed much labour, to wit, that justice is not a natural but an artificial virtue.[41]

‹413› This system of the foundation of virtue is so contradictory in many of its essential points to the account we have before given of the active powers of human nature, that, if the one be true, the other must be false.

If GOD has given to man a power which we call *conscience*, the *moral faculty*, the *sense of duty*, by which, when he comes to years of understanding, he perceives certain things that depend on his will to be his duty, and other things to be base and unworthy; if the notion of duty be a simple conception, of its own kind, and of a different nature from the conceptions of utility and agreeableness, of interest or reputation; if this moral faculty be the prerogative of man, and no vestige of it be found in brute-animals; if it be given us by GOD to regulate all our animal affections and passions; if to be governed by it be the glory of man and the image of GOD in his soul, and to disregard its dictates be his dishonour and depravity: I say, if these things be so, to seek the foundation of morality in the affections which we have in common with the brutes, is to seek the living among the dead, and to change the glory of

40. See above, p. 294, note 26.
41. See *Treatise* 3.2.1–3.

man, and the image of GOD in his soul, into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass.[42]

If virtue and vice be a matter of choice, they must consist in voluntary actions, or in fixed purposes of acting according to a certain rule when there is opportunity, and not in qualities of mind which are involuntary.

It is true, that every virtue is both agreeable and useful in the highest degree; and that every quality that is agreeable or useful, has a merit upon that account. But virtue has a merit peculiar to itself, a merit which does not arise from its being useful or agreeable, but from its being virtue. This merit is discerned by the same faculty by which we discern it to be virtue, and by no other.

‹414› We give the name of *esteem* both to the regard we have for things useful and agreeable, and to the regard we have for virtue; but these are different kinds of esteem. I esteem a man for his ingenuity and learning. I esteem him for his moral worth. The sound of *esteem* in both these speeches is the same, but its meaning is very different.

Good breeding is a very amiable quality; and even if I knew that the man had no motive to it but its pleasure and utility to himself and others, I should like it still, but I would not in that case call it a moral virtue.

A dog has a tender concern for her puppies; so has a man for his children. The natural affection is the same in both, and is amiable in both. But why do we impute moral virtue to the man on account of this concern, and not to the dog? The reason surely is, That, in the man, the natural affection is accompanied with a sense of duty, but, in the dog, it is not. The same thing may be said of all the kind affections common to us with the brutes. They are amiable qualities, but they are not moral virtues.

What has been said relates to Mr HUME's system in general. We are now to consider his notion of the particular virtue of justice, that its merit consists wholly in its utility to society.

That justice is highly useful and necessary in society, and, on that account, ought to be loved and esteemed by all that love mankind, will readily be granted. And as justice is a social virtue, it is true also, that there could be no exercise of it, and perhaps we should have no conception of it, without society. But this is equally true of the natural affections of benevolence, gratitude, friendship and compassion, which Mr HUME makes to be the natural virtues.

It may be granted to Mr HUME, that men have no concep‹415›tion of

42. Reid alludes to Job 40:15.

the virtue of justice till they have lived some time in society. It is purely a moral conception, and our moral conceptions and moral judgments are not born with us. They grow up by degrees, as our reason does. Nor do I pretend to know how early, or in what order we acquire the conception of the several virtues. The conception of justice supposes some exercise of the moral faculty, which, being the noblest part of the human constitution, and that to which all its other parts are subservient, appears latest.

It may likewise be granted, that there is no animal affection in human nature that prompts us immediately to acts of justice, as such. We have natural affections of the animal kind, which immediately prompt us to acts of kindness; but none, that I know, that has the same relation to justice. The very conception of justice supposes a moral faculty; but our natural kind affections do not; otherwise we must allow that brutes have this faculty.

What I maintain is, *first*, That when men come to the exercise of their moral faculty, they perceive a turpitude in injustice, as they do in other crimes, and consequently an obligation to justice, abstracting from the consideration of its utility. And, *secondly*, That as soon as men have any rational conception of a favour, and of an injury, they must have the conception of justice, and perceive its obligation distinct from its utility.

The first of these points hardly admits of any other proof, but an appeal to the sentiments of every honest man, and every man of honour, Whether his indignation is not immediately inflamed against an atrocious act of villany, without the cool consideration of its distant consequences upon the good of society?

We might appeal even to robbers and pirates, Whether they‹416› have not had great struggles with their conscience, when they first resolved to break through all the rules of justice? And whether, in a solitary and serious hour, they have not frequently felt the pangs of guilt? They have very often confessed this at a time when all disguise is laid aside.

The common good of society, though a pleasing object to all men, when presented to their view, hardly ever enters into the thoughts of the far greatest part of mankind; and, if a regard to it were the sole motive to justice, the number of honest men must be small indeed. It would be confined to the higher ranks, who by their education, or by their office, are led to make the public good an object; but that it is so confined, I believe no man will venture to affirm.

The temptations to injustice are strongest in the lowest class of men;

and if nature had provided no motive to oppose those temptations, but a sense of public good, there would not be found an honest man in that class.

To all men that are not greatly corrupted, injustice, as well as cruelty and ingratitude, is an object of disapprobation on its own account. There is a voice within us that proclaims it to be base, unworthy, and deserving of punishment.

That there is, in all ingenuous natures, an antipathy to roguery and treachery, a reluctance to the thoughts of villany and baseness, we have the testimony of Mr HUME himself, who, as I doubt not but he felt it, has expressed it very strongly in the conclusion to his enquiry, and acknowledged that, in some cases, without this reluctance and antipathy to dishonesty, a sensible knave would find no sufficient motive from public good to be honest.

‹417› I shall give the passage at large from the Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, section 9. near the end.

‘Treating vice with the greatest candour, and making it all possible concessions, we must acknowledge that there is not, in any instance, the smallest pretext for giving it the preference above virtue, with a view to self-interest; except, perhaps, in the case of justice, where a man, taking things in a certain light, may often seem to be a loser by his integrity. And though it is allowed that, without a regard to property, no society could subsist; yet, according to the imperfect way in which human affairs are conducted, a sensible knave, in particular incidents, may think, that an act of iniquity or infidelity will make a considerable addition to his fortune, without causing any considerable breach in the social union and con - federacy. That *honesty is the best policy* , may be a good general rule, but it is liable to many exceptions: And he, it may perhaps be thought, conducts himself with most wisdom, who observes the general rule, and takes advantage of all the exceptions.

‘I must confess that, if a man think that this reasoning much requires an answer, it will be a little difficult to find any, which will to him appear satisfactory and convincing. If his heart rebel not against such pernicious maxims, if he feel no reluctance to the thoughts of villany and baseness, he has indeed lost a considerable motive to virtue, and we may expect that his practice will be answerable to his speculation. But in all ingenuous natures, the antipathy to treachery and roguery is too strong to be counterbalanced by any views of profit or pecuniary advantage. Inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our

own conduct; these are circumstances very requisite to happiness, and will be cherished and cultivated by every honest man who feels the importance of them.'[43]

‹418› The reasoning of the *sensible knave* in this passage, seems to me to be justly founded upon the principles of the Enquiry and of the Treatise of Human Nature, and therefore it is no wonder, that the author should find it a little difficult to give any answer which would appear satisfactory and convincing to such a man. To counterbalance this reasoning, he puts in the other scale a reluctance, an antipathy, a rebellion of the heart against such pernicious maxims, which is felt by ingenuous natures.

Let us consider a little the force of Mr HUME's answer to this sensible knave, who reasons upon his own principles. I think it is either an acknowledgment, that there is a natural judgment of conscience in man, that injustice and treachery is a base and unworthy practice, which is the point I would establish; or it has no force to convince either the knave or an honest man.

A clear and intuitive judgment, resulting from the constitution of human nature, is sufficient to overbalance a train of subtile reasoning on the other side. Thus, the testimony of our senses is sufficient to overbalance all the subtile arguments brought against their testimony. And, if there be a like testimony of conscience in favour of honesty, all the subtile reasoning of the knave against it ought to be rejected without examination, as fallacious and sophistical, because it concludes against a self-evident principle; just as we reject the subtile reasoning of the metaphysician against the evidence of sense.

If, therefore, the *reluctance*, the *antipathy*, the *rebellion of the heart* against injustice, which Mr HUME sets against the reasoning of the knave, include in their meaning a natural intuitive judgment of conscience, that injustice is base and unworthy, the reasoning of the knave is convincingly answered; but the ‹419› principle, *That justice is an artificial virtue, approved solely for its utility*, is given up.

If, on the other hand, the antipathy, reluctance and rebellion of heart, imply no judgment, but barely an uneasy feeling, and that not natural, but acquired and artificial, the answer is indeed very agreeable to the principles of the *Enquiry*, but has no force to convince the knave, or any other man.

The knave is here supposed by Mr HUME to have no such feelings, and

43. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 9.22–3: SBN 282–3.

therefore the answer does not touch his case in the least, but leaves him in the full possession of his reasoning. And *ingenuous natures*, who have these feelings, are left to deliberate whether they will yield to acquired and artificial feelings, in opposition to rules of conduct, which, to their best judgment, appear wise and prudent.

The *second* thing I proposed to shew was, That, as soon as men have any rational conception of a favour and of an injury, they must have the conception of justice, and perceive its obligation.

The power with which the Author of nature hath endowed us, may be employed either to do good to our fellow-men, or to hurt them. When we employ our power to promote the good and happiness of others, this is a benefit or favour; when we employ it to hurt them, it is an injury. Justice fills up the middle between these two. It is such a conduct as does no injury to others; but it does not imply the doing them any favour.

The notions of a *favour* and of an *injury*, appear as early in the mind of man as any rational notion whatever. They are discovered, not by language only, but by certain affections of‹420› mind, of which they are the natural objects. A favour naturally produces gratitude. An injury done to ourselves produces resentment; and even when done to another, it produces indignation.

I take it for granted that gratitude and resentment are no less natural to the human mind than hunger and thirst; and that those affections are no less naturally excited by their proper objects and occasions than these appetites.

It is no less evident, that the proper and formal object of gratitude is a person who has done us a favour; that of resentment, a person who has done us an injury.

Before the use of reason, the distinction between a favour and an agreeable office is not perceived. Every action of another person which gives present pleasure produces love and good will towards the agent. Every action that gives pain or uneasiness produces resentment. This is common to man before the use of reason, and to the more sagacious brutes; and it shews no conception of justice in either.

But, as we grow up to the use of reason, the notion, both of a favour and of an injury, grows more distinct and better defined. It is not enough that a good office be done; it must be done from good will, and with a good intention, otherwise it is no favour, nor does it produce gratitude.

I have heard of a physician who gave spiders in a medicine to a dropsical patient, with an intention to poison him, and that this medicine

cured the patient, contrary to the intention of the physician. Surely no gratitude, but resentment, was due by the patient, when he knew the real state of the case. It is evident to every man, that a benefit arising from the action of ano ‹421› ther, either without or against his intention, is not a motive to gratitude; that is, is no favour.

Another thing implied in the nature of a favour is, that it be not due. A man may save my credit by paying what he owes me. In this case, what he does tends to my benefit, and perhaps is done with that intention; but it is not a favour, it is no more than he was bound to do.

If a servant do his work and receive his wages, there is no favour done on either part, nor any object of gratitude; because, though each party has benefited the other, yet neither has done more than he was bound to do.

What I infer from this is, That the conception of a favour in every man come to years of understanding, implies the conception of things not due, and consequently the conception of things that are due.

A negative cannot be conceived by one who has no conception of the correspondent positive. Not to be due is the negative of being due; and he who conceives one of them must conceive both. The conception of things due and not due must therefore be found in every mind which has any rational conception of a favour, or any rational sentiment of gratitude.

If we consider, on the other hand, what an injury is which is the object of the natural passion of resentment, every man, capable of reflection, perceives, that an injury implies more than being hurt. If I be hurt by a stone falling out of the wall, or by a flash of lightning, or by a convulsive and involuntary motion of another man's arm, no injury is done, no resentment raised in a man that has reason. In this, as in all ‹422› moral actions, there must be the will and intention of the agent to do the hurt.

Nor is this sufficient to constitute an injury. The man who breaks my fences, or treads down my corn, when he cannot otherwise preserve himself from destruction, who has no injurious intention, and is willing to indemnify me for the hurt which necessity, and not ill will, led him to do, is not injurious, nor is an object of resentment.

The executioner who does his duty, in cutting off the head of a condemned criminal, is not an object of resentment. He does nothing unjust, and therefore nothing injurious.

From this it is evident, that an injury, the object of the natural passion of resentment, implies in it the notion of injustice. And it is no less evident, that no man can have a notion of injustice without having the notion of justice.

To sum up what has been said upon this point: A favour, an act of justice and an injury, are so related to one another that he who conceives one must conceive the other two. They lie, as it were, in one line, and resemble the relations of greater, less and equal. If one understands what is meant by one line being greater or less than another, he can be at no loss to understand what is meant by its being equal to the other; for, if it be neither greater nor less, it must be equal.

In like manner, of those actions by which we profit or hurt other men, a favour is more than justice, an injury is less; and that which is neither a favour nor an injury is a just action.

As soon, therefore, as men come to have any proper notion of a favour and of an injury; as soon as they have any rational exercise of gratitude and of resentment; so soon they must‹423›have the conception of justice and of injustice; and if gratitude and resentment be natural to man, which Mr HUME allows, the notion of justice must be no less natural.

The notion of justice carries inseparably along with it, a perception of its moral obligation. For to say that such an action is an act of justice, that it is due, that it ought to be done, that we are under a moral obligation to do it, are only different ways of expressing the same thing. It is true, that we perceive no high degree of moral worth in a merely just action, when it is not opposed by interest or passion; but we perceive a high degree of turpitude and demerit in unjust actions, or in the omission of what justice requires.

Indeed, if there were no other argument to prove, that the obligation of justice is not solely derived from its utility to procure what is agreeable either to ourselves or to society, this would be sufficient, That the very conception of justice implies its obligation. The morality of justice is included in the very idea of it: Nor is it possible that the conception of justice can enter into the human mind, without carrying along with it the conception of duty and moral obligation. Its obligation, therefore, is inseparable from its nature, and is not derived solely from its utility, either to ourselves or to society.

We may farther observe, That as in all moral estimation, every action takes its denomination from the motive that produces it; so no action can properly be denominated an act of justice, unless it be done from a regard to justice.

If a man pays his debt, only that he may not be cast into prison, he is not a just man, because prudence, and not justice, is his motive. And if a man, from benevolence and charity, gives to another what is really due to

him, but what he believes ‹424› not to be due, this is not an act of justice in him, but of charity or benevolence, because it is not done from a motive of justice. These are self-evident truths; nor is it less evident, that what a man does, merely to procure something agreeable, either to himself or to others, is not an act of justice, nor has the merit of justice.

Good music and good cookery have the merit of utility, in procuring what is agreeable both to ourselves and to society, but they never obtained among mankind the denomination of moral virtues. Indeed, if this author's system be well founded, great injustice has been done them on that account.

I shall now make some observations upon the reasoning of this author, in proof of his favourite principle, That justice is not a natural but an artificial virtue; or, as it is expressed in the *Enquiry*, That public utility is the sole origin of justice, and that reflections on the beneficial consequences of this virtue are the sole foundation of its merit.[44]

1. It must be acknowledged, that this principle has a necessary connection with his system concerning the foundation of all virtue; and therefore it is no wonder that he hath taken so much pains to support it; for the whole system must stand or fall with it.

If the *dulce* and the *utile*, that is, pleasure, and what is useful to procure pleasure, be the whole merit of virtue, justice can have no merit beyond its utility to procure pleasure. If, on the other hand, an intrinsic worth in justice and demerit in injustice be discerned by every man that hath a conscience; if there be a natural principle in the constitution of man, by which justice is approved and injustice disapproved and condemned, then the whole of this laboured system must fall to the ground.

‹425› 2. We may observe, That as justice is directly opposed to injury, and as there are various ways in which a man may be injured, so there must be various branches of justice opposed to the different kinds of injury.

A man may be injured, *first*, in his person, by wounding, maiming or killing him; *secondly*, in his family, by robbing him of his children, or any way injuring those he is bound to protect; *thirdly*, in his liberty, by confinement; *fourthly*, in his reputation; *fifthly*, in his goods or property; and, *lastly*, in the violation of contracts or engagements made with him. This enumeration, whether complete or not, is sufficient for the present purpose.

44. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.1: SBN 183.

The different branches of justice, opposed to these different kinds of injury, are commonly expressed by saying, that an innocent man has a right to the safety of his person and family, a right to his liberty and reputation, a right to his goods, and to fidelity to engagements made with him. To say that he has a right to these things, has precisely the same meaning as to say, that justice requires that he should be permitted to enjoy them, or that it is unjust to violate them. For injustice is the violation of right, and justice is to yield to every man what is his right.

These things being understood as the simplest and most common ways of expressing the various branches of justice, we are to consider how far Mr HUME'S reasoning proves any or all of them to be artificial, or grounded solely upon public utility. The last of them, fidelity to engagements, is to be the subject of the next chapter, and therefore I shall say nothing of it in this.

The four first named, to wit, the right of an innocent man to the safety of his person and family, to his liberty and reputa ‹426›tion, are, by the writers on jurisprudence, called *natural* rights of man, because they are grounded in the nature of man as a rational and moral agent, and are by his Creator committed to his care and keeping. By being called *natural* or *innate*, they are distinguished from acquired rights, which suppose some previous act or deed of man by which they are acquired, whereas natural rights suppose nothing of this kind.[45]

When a man's natural rights are violated, he perceives intuitively, and he feels that he is injured. The feeling of his heart arises from the judgment of his understanding; for if he did not believe that the hurt was intended, and unjustly intended, he would not have that feeling. He perceives that injury is done to himself, and that he has a right to redress. The natural principle of resentment is roused by the view of its proper object, and excites him to defend his right. Even the injurious person is conscious of his doing injury; he dreads a just retaliation; and if it be in the power of the injured person, he expects it as due and deserved.

That these sentiments spring up in the mind of man as naturally as his

45. Reid discusses rights at length in *Practical Ethics*, pp. 41–9; see also 4/III/18. In his adoption of the traditional definition of rights in terms of injury, he closely resembles Adam Smith: see *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, LJ(A) i.1–25 (esp. i.9); and LJ(B) 5–11. The distinction between natural and acquired, or adventitious, rights and duties was traditional in modern natural law; cf. Grotius, *De jure belli ac pacis*, I.1.x, Section 4; Pufendorf, *Law of Nature*, I.1.vii and II.3.xxiv; Hutcheson, *Philosophiae moralis institutio /Short Introduction*, II.4.ii, pp. 128–9 and *System,* vol. I, p. 293.

body grows to its proper stature; that they are not the birth of instruction, either of parents, priests, philosophers or politicians, but the pure growth of nature, cannot, I think, without effrontery, be denied. We find them equally strong in the most savage and in the most civilized tribes of mankind; and nothing can weaken them but an inveterate habit of rapine and bloodshed, which benumbs the conscience, and turns men into wild beasts.

The public good is very properly considered by the judge who punishes a private injury, but seldom enters into the thought of the injured person. In all criminal law, the redress due to the private sufferer is distinguished from that which is due to the public; a distinction which could have no foundation, ‹427› if the demerit of injustice arose solely from its hurting the public. And every man is conscious of a specific difference between the resentment he feels for an injury done to himself, and his indignation against a wrong done to the public.

I think, therefore, it is evident, that, of the six branches of justice we mentioned, four are natural, in the strictest sense, being founded upon the constitution of man, and antecedent to all deeds and conventions of society; so that, if there were but two men upon the earth, one might be unjust and injurious, and the other injured.

But does Mr Hume maintain the contrary?

To this question I answer, That his doctrine seems to imply it, but I hope he meant it not.

He affirms in general that justice is not a natural virtue; that it derives its origin solely from public utility, and that reflections on the beneficial consequences of this virtue are the sole foundation of its merit. He mentions no particular branch of justice as an exception to this general rule; yet justice, in common language, and in all the writers on jurisprudence I am acquainted with, comprehends the four branches above mentioned. His doctrine, therefore, according to the common construction of words, extends to these four, as well as to the two other branches of justice.

On the other hand, if we attend to his long and laboured proof of this doctrine, it appears evident, that he had in his eye only two particular branches of justice.[46] No part of his reasoning applies to the other four. He seems, I know not why, to have taken up a confined notion of justice, and

46. For drafts of the following discussion of Hume's too narrow concept of justice and the comparisons with Hobbes and Cicero, see 4/III/18.

to have restricted it to a regard to property and fidelity in contracts. As to other branches he is silent. He no where says, that it is not ‹428› naturally criminal to rob an innocent man of his life, of his children, of his liberty, or of his reputation; and I am apt to think he never meant it.

The only Philosopher I know who has had the assurance to maintain this, is Mr HOBBES, who makes the state of nature to be a state of war, of every man against every man; and of such a war in which every man has a right to do and to acquire whatever his power can, by any means, accomplish; that is, a state wherein neither right nor injury, justice not injustice, can possibly exist.[47]

Mr HUME mentions this system of HOBBES, but without adopting it, though he allows it the authority of CICERO in its favour.

He says in a note, 'This fiction of a state of nature as a state of war was not first started by Mr HOBBES, as is commonly imagined. PLATO endeavours to refute an hypothesis very like it, in the 2d, 3d and 4th books, *De Republica*. CICERO, on the contrary, supposes it certain and universally acknowledged, in the following passage, *&c. Pro Sextio, l.* 42.'[48]

The passage, which he quotes at large, from one of CICERO's Orations, seems to me to require some straining to make it tally with the system of Mr HOBBES. Be this as it may, Mr HUME might have added, That CICERO, in his Orations, like many other pleaders, sometimes says not what he believed, but what was fit to support the cause of his client. That CICERO's opinion, with regard to the natural obligation of justice, was very different from that of Mr HOBBES, and even from Mr HUME's, is very well known.

3. As Mr HUME, therefore, has said nothing to prove the four branches of justice which relate to the innate rights of ‹429› men, to be artificial, or to derive their origin solely from public utility, I proceed to the fifth branch, which requires us not to invade another man's property.

The right of property is not innate, but acquired. It is not grounded upon the constitution of man, but upon his actions. Writers on jurisprudence have explained its origin in a manner that may satisfy every man of common understanding.[49]

47. See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chap. 13.
48. See Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.15 note: SBN 189–90 note.
49. Property is discussed extensively in *Practical Ethics*, but see especially pp. 45–50 and 103–11.

The earth is given to men in common for the purposes of life, by the bounty of Heaven. But, to divide it, and appropriate one part of its produce to one, another part to another, must be the work of men who have power and understanding given them, by which every man may accommodate himself without hurt to any other.

This common right of every man to what the earth produces, before it be occupied and appropriated by others, was, by ancient moralists, very properly compared to the right which every citizen had to the public theatre, where every man that came might occupy an empty seat, and thereby acquire a right to it while the entertainment lasted; but no man had a right to dispossess another.[50]

The earth is a great theatre, furnished by the Almighty, with perfect wisdom and goodness, for the entertainment and employment of all mankind. Here every man has a right to accommodate himself as a spectator, and to perform his part as an actor, but without hurt to others.

He who does so is a just man, and thereby entitled to some degree of moral approbation; and he who not only does no hurt, but employs his power to do good, is a good man, and is thereby entitled to a higher degree of moral approbation. But he who justles and molests his neighbour, who deprives him of ‹430› any accommodation which his industry has provided without hurt to others, is unjust, and a proper object of resentment.

It is true, therefore, that property has a beginning from the actions of men, occupying, and perhaps improving, by their industry, what was common by nature. It is true also, that before property exists, that branch of justice and injustice which regards property cannot exist. But it is also true, that where there are men, there will very soon be property of one kind or another, and consequently there will be that branch of justice which attends property as its guardian.

There are two kinds of property which we may distinguish.

The *first* is what must presently be consumed to sustain life; the *second*, which is more permanent, is what may be laid up and stored for the supply of future wants.

Some of the gifts of nature must be used and consumed by individuals

50. The simile of the theatre seats was a trope commonly invoked to analyse the nature of the communality of the world prior to individual property. The most popular ancient sources were Cicero, *De finibus* III.xx (67), and Seneca, *De beneficiis* VII.12. See also Grotius, *De jure belli ac pacis*, II.2.ii; Pufendorf, *Law of Nature*, IV.4.ii and ix.

for the daily support of life; but they cannot be used till they be occupied and appropriated. If another person may, without injustice, rob me of what I have innocently occupied for present subsistence, the necessary consequence must be, that he may, without injustice, take away my life.

A right to life implies a right to the necessary means of life. And that justice which forbids the taking away the life of an innocent man, forbids no less the taking from him the necessary means of life. He has the same right to defend the one as the other; and nature inspires him with the same just resentment of the one injury as of the other.

The natural right of liberty implies a right to such innocent labour as a man chuses, and to the fruit of that labour. To‹431› hinder another man's innocent labour, or to deprive him of the fruit of it, is an injustice of the same kind, and has the same effect as to put him in fetters or in prison, and is equally a just object of resentment.

Thus it appears, that some kind, or some degree, of property must exist wherever men exist, and that the right to such property is the necessary consequence of the natural right of men to life and liberty.

It has been further observed, that GOD has made man a sagacious and provident animal, led by his constitution not only to occupy and use what nature has provided for the supply of his present wants and necessities, but to foresee future wants, and to provide for them; and that not only for himself, but for his family, his friends and connections.

He therefore acts in perfect conformity to his nature, when he stores, of the fruit of his labour, what may afterwards be useful to himself or to others; when he invents and fabricates utensils or machines by which his labour may be facilitated, and its produce increased; and when, by exchanging with his fellow-men commodities or labour, he accommodates both himself and them. These are the natural and innocent exertions of that understanding wherewith his Maker has endowed him. He has therefore a right to exercise them, and to enjoy the fruit of them. Every man who impedes him in making such exertions, or deprives him of the fruit of them, is injurious and unjust, and an object of just resentment.

Many brute-animals are led by instinct to provide for futurity, and to defend their store, and their store-house, against all invaders. There seems to be in man, before the use of reason, an instinct of the same kind. When reason and conscience‹432› grow up, they approve and justify this provident care, and condemn, as unjust, every invasion of others, that may frustrate it.

Two instances of this provident sagacity seem to be peculiar to man. I

mean the invention of utensils and machines for facilitating labour, and the making exchanges with his fellow-men for mutual benefit. No tribe of men has been found so rude as not to practise these things in some degree. And I know no tribe of brutes that was ever observed to practise them. They neither invent nor use utensils or machines, nor do they traffic by exchanges.

From these observations, I think it evident, that man, even in the state of nature, by his powers of body and mind, may acquire permanent property, or what we call *riches*, by which his own and his family's wants are more liberally supplied, and his power enlarged to requite his benefactors, to relieve objects of compassion, to make friends, and to defend his property against unjust invaders. And we know from history, that men, who had no superior on earth, no connection with any public beyond their own family, have acquired property, and had distinct notions of that justice and injustice, of which it is the object.

Every man, as a reasonable creature, has a right to gratify his natural and innocent desires, without hurt to others. No desire is more natural, or more reasonable, than that of supplying his wants. When this is done without hurt to any man, to hinder or frustrate his innocent labour, is an unjust violation of his natural liberty. Private utility leads a man to desire property, and to labour for it; and his right to it is only a right to labour for his own benefit.

That public utility is the sole origin, even of that branch of justice which regards property, is so far from being true, that when men confederate and constitute a public, under laws and‹433› government, the right of each individual to his property is, by that confederation, abridged and limited. In the state of nature every man's property was solely at his own disposal, because he had no superior. In civil society it must be subject to the laws of the society. He gives up to the public part of that right which he had in the state of nature, as the price of that protection and security which he receives from civil society. In the state of nature, he was sole judge in his own cause, and had right to defend his property, his liberty, and life, as far as his power reached. In the state of civil society, he must submit to the judgment of the society, and acquiesce in its sentence, though he should conceive it to be unjust.

What was said above, of the natural right every man has to acquire permanent property, and to dispose of it, must be understood with this condition, That no other man be thereby deprived of the necessary means of life. The right of an innocent man to the necessaries of life, is, in its

nature, superior to that which the rich man has to his riches, even though they be honestly acquired. The use of riches, or permanent property, is to supply future and casual wants, which ought to yield to present and certain necessity.

As, in a family, justice requires that the children who are unable to labour, and those who, by sickness, are disabled, should have their necessities supplied out of the common stock, so, in the great family of GOD, of which all mankind are the children, justice, I think, as well as charity, requires, that the necessities of those who, by the providence of GOD, are disabled from supplying themselves, should be supplied from what might otherwise be stored for future wants.

From this it appears, That the right of acquiring and that of disposing of property, may be subject to limitations and restrictions, even in the state of nature, and much more in the‹434› state of civil society, in which the public has what writers in jurisprudence call an *eminent dominion* over the property, as well as over the lives of the subjects, as far as the public good requires.[51]

If these principles be well founded, Mr HUME's arguments to prove that justice is an artificial virtue, or that its public utility is the sole foundation of its merit, may be easily answered.

He supposes, *first*, a state in which nature has bestowed on the human race, such abundance of external goods, that every man, without care or industry, finds himself provided of whatever he can wish or desire. It is evident, says he, that in such a state, the cautious jealous virtue of justice would never once have been dreamed of.[52]

It may be observed, *first*, That this argument applies only to one of the six branches of justice before mentioned. The other five are not in the least affected by it; and the Reader will easily perceive that this observation applies to almost all his arguments, so that it needs not be repeated.

Secondly, All that this argument proves is, That a state of the human race may be conceived wherein no property exists, and where, of consequence, there can be no exercise of that branch of justice which respects

51. The right to take over private property for public purposes had become recognized as an inherent part of sovereignty, and Reid showed interest in the matter in his lectures. See *Practical Ethics* pp. 158–9, 207 note 41, p. 258 note 33, pp. 300–1 notes 19–21 and p. 304 note 25. For the extensive natural law literature on which Reid drew, see ibid., p. 300 note 19.

52. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,* 3.2–5: SBN 183–4.

property. But does it follow from this, that where property exists, and must exist, that no regard ought to be had to it?

He next supposes that the necessities of the human race continuing the same as at present, the mind is so enlarged with friendship and generosity, that every man feels as much tenderness and concern for the interest of every man, as for his own. It seems evident, he says, that the use of justice would be suspended by such an extensive benevolence, nor would the divi ‹435›sions and barriers of property and obligation have ever been thought of.[53]

I answer, The conduct which this extensive benevolence leads to, is either perfectly consistent with justice, or it is not. *First*, If there be any case where this benevolence would lead us to do injustice, the use of justice is not suspended. Its obligation is superior to that of benevolence; and, to shew benevolence to one, at the expence of injustice to another, is immoral. *Secondly*, Supposing no such case could happen, the use of justice would not be suspended, because by it we must distinguish good offices to which we had a right, from those to which we had no right, and which therefore require a return of gratitude. *Thirdly*, Supposing the use of justice to be suspended, as it must be in every case where it cannot be exercised, Will it follow, that its obligation is suspended, where there is access to exercise it?

A *third* supposition is, the reverse of the first, That a society falls into extreme want of the necessaries of life: The question is put, Whether in such a case, an equal partition of bread, without regard to private property, though effected by power, and even by violence, would be regarded as criminal and injurious? And the Author conceives, that this would be a suspension of the strict laws of justice.[54]

I answer, That such an equal partition as Mr HUME mentions, is so far from being criminal or injurious, that justice requires it; and surely that cannot be a suspension of the laws of justice, which is an act of justice. All that the strictest justice requires in such a case, is, That the man whose life is preserved at the expence of another, and without his consent, should indemnify him when he is able. His case is similar to that of a debtor who is insolvent, without any fault on his part. Justice requires that he should be forborn till he is able to pay. It is strange that M‹436› HUME should think that an action, neither criminal nor injurious, should be a

53. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.6–7: SBN 184–6.
54. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.8–9: SBN 186–7.

suspension of the laws of justice. This seems to me a contradiction; for *justice* and *injury* are contradictory terms.

The next argument is thus expressed: 'When any man, even in political society, renders himself, by crimes, obnoxious to the public, he is punished in his goods and person; that is, the ordinary rules of justice are, with regard to him, suspended for a moment, and it becomes equitable to inflict on him, what otherwise he could not suffer without wrong or injury.'[55]

This argument, like the former, refutes itself. For that an action should be a suspension of the rules of justice, and at the same time equitable, seems to me a contradiction. It is possible that equity may interfere with the letter of human laws, because all the cases that may fall under them, cannot be foreseen; but that equity should interfere with justice is impossible. It is strange that Mr HUME should think, that justice requires that a criminal should be treated in the same way as an innocent man.

Another argument is taken from public war. What is it, says he, but a suspension of justice among the warring parties? The laws of war, which then succeed to those of equity and justice, are rules calculated for the advantage and utility of that particular state in which men are now placed.[56]

I answer, when war is undertaken for self-defence, or for reparation of intolerable injuries, justice authorises it. The laws of war, which have been described by many judicious moralists, are all drawn from the fountain of justice and equity; and every thing contrary to justice, is contrary to the laws of war. That justice, which prescribes one rule of conduct to a master, ‹437› another to a servant; one to a parent, another to a child; prescribes also one rule of conduct towards a friend, another towards an enemy. I do not understand what Mr HUME means by the *advantage* and *utility* of a state of war, for which he says the laws of war are calculated, and succeed to those of justice and equity. I know no laws of war that are not calculated for justice and equity.

The next argument is this, were there a species of creatures intermingled with men, which, though rational, were possessed of such inferior strength, both of body and mind, that they were incapable of all resistance, and could never, upon the highest provocation, make us feel the effects of their resentment; the necessary consequence, I think, is, that

55. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.10: SBN 187.
56. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.11: SBN 187–8.

we should be bound, by the laws of humanity, to give gentle usage to these creatures, but should not, properly speaking, lie under any restraint of justice with regard to them, nor could they possess any right or property, exclusive of such arbitrary lords.[57]

If Mr HUME had not owned this sentiment as a consequence of his Theory of Morals, I should have thought it very uncharitable to impute it to him. However, we may judge of the Theory by its avowed consequence. For there cannot be better evidence, that a theory of morals, or of any particular virtue, is false, than when it subverts the practical rules of morals. This defenceless species of rational creatures, is doomed by Mr HUME to have no rights. Why? Because they have no power to defend themselves. Is not this to say, That right has its origin from power; which, indeed, was the doctrine of Mr HOBBES. And to illustrate this doctrine, Mr HUME adds, That as no inconvenience ever results from the exercise of a power, so firmly established in nature, the restraints of justice and property being totally useless, could never have place in so unequal a confederacy; and, to the same purpose, he says, that the female part of ‹438› our own species, owe the share they have in the rights of society, to the power which their address and their charms give them.[58] If this be sound morals, Mr HUME's Theory of Justice may be true.

We may here observe, that though, in other places, Mr HUME founds the obligation of justice upon its utility to *ourselves*, or to *others*, it is here founded solely upon utility to *ourselves*. For surely to be treated with justice would be highly useful to the defenceless species he here supposes to exist. But as no inconvenience to ourselves can ever result from our treatment of them, he concludes, that justice would be useless, and therefore can have no place. Mr HOBBES could have said no more.

He supposes, in the *last* place, a state of human nature, wherein all society and intercourse is cut off between man and man. It is evident, he says, that so solitary a being would be as much incapable of justice as of social discourse and conversation.[59]

And would not so solitary a being be as incapable of friendship, generosity and compassion, as of justice? If this argument prove justice to be an artificial virtue, it will, with equal force, prove every social virtue to be artificial.

57. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.18: SBN 190–1.
58. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.19: SBN 191.
59. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.20: SBN 191–2.

These are the arguments which Mr HUME has advanced, in his *Enquiry*, in the first part of a long section upon justice.

In the *second* part, the arguments are not so clearly distinguished, nor can they be easily collected. I shall offer some remarks upon what seems most specious in this second part.

He begins with observing, 'That, if we examine the particular laws by which justice is directed and property determined, they present us with the same conclusion. The good ‹439› of mankind is the only object of all those laws and regulations.'[60]

It is not easy to perceive where the stress of this argument lies. *The good of mankind is the object of all the laws and regulations by which justice is directed and property determined; therefore justice is not a natural virtue, but has its origin solely from public utility, and its beneficial consequences are the sole foundation of its merit.*

Some step seems to be wanting to connect the antecedent proposition with the conclusion, which, I think, must be one or other of these two propositions; first, *All the rules of justice tend to public utility*; or, secondly, *Public utility is the only standard of justice, from which alone all its rules must be deduced.*

If the argument be, That justice must have its origin solely from public utility, because all its rules tend to public utility, I cannot admit the consequence; nor can Mr HUME admit it without overturning his own system. For the rules of benevolence and humanity do all tend to the public utility, and yet in his system, they have another foundation in human nature; so likewise may the rules of justice.

I am apt to think, therefore, that the argument is to be taken in the last sense, That public utility is the only standard of justice, from which all its rules must be deduced; and therefore justice has its origin solely from public utility.

This seems to be Mr HUME's meaning, because, in what follows, he observes, That, in order to establish laws for the regulation of property, we must be acquainted with the nature and situation of man; must reject appearances which may be false, though specious; and must search for those rules which are, on the whole, most useful and beneficial; and endeavours to shew, that the established rules which regard property are more for the public good, than the system, either of those reli‹440›gious fanatics of the last age, who held, that saints only should inherit the earth;

60. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.22: SBN 192.

or of those political fanatics, who claimed an equal division of property.[61]

We see here, as before, that though Mr HUME's conclusion respects justice in general, his argument is confined to one branch of justice, to wit, the right of property; and it is well known that, to conclude from a part to the whole, is not good reasoning.

Besides, the proposition from which his conclusion is drawn, cannot be granted, either with regard to property, or with regard to the other branches of justice.

We endeavoured before to show, that property, though not an innate but an acquired right, may be acquired in the state of nature, and agreeably to the laws of nature; and that this right has not its origin from human laws, made for the public good, though, when men enter into political society, it may and ought to be regulated by those laws.

If there were but two men upon the face of the earth, of ripe faculties, each might have his own property, and might know his right to defend it, and his obligation not to invade the property of the other. He would have no need to have recourse to reasoning from public good, in order to know when he was injured, either in his property, or in any of his natural rights, or to know what rules of justice he ought to observe towards his neighbour.

The simple rule, of not doing to his neighbour what he would think wrong to be done to himself, would lead him to the knowledge of every branch of justice, without the consideration of public good, or of laws and statutes made to promote it.

‹441› It is not true, therefore, That public utility is the only standard of justice, and that the rules of justice can be deduced only from their public utility.

ARISTIDES, and the people of Athens, had surely another notion of justice, when he pronounced the counsel of THEMISTOCLES, which was communicated to him only, to be highly useful, but unjust; and the assembly, upon this authority, rejected the proposal unheard. These honest citizens, though subject to no laws but of their own making, far from making utility the standard of justice, made justice to be the standard of utility.[62]

61. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.23–4: SBN 192–3.
62. Reid is referring to the story, told by Plutarch in *Lives* ('Aristides' and 'Themistocles'), and also by Cicero in *De officiis* III.xi (49), of how Themistocles had a plan that could not be made public to the Athenian assembly, which therefore appointed Aristides to hear it. The plan was to burn the fleet of the other Greek cities, thus giving Athens naval hegemony. When Aristides simply told the

'*What is a man's property*? Any thing which it is lawful for him, and for him alone, to use. *But what rule have we by which we can distinguish these objects*? Here we must have recourse to statutes, customs, precedents, analogies, &c.'[63]

Does not this imply, that, in the state of nature, there can be no distinction of property? If so, Mr HUME's state of nature is the same with that of Mr HOBBES.

It is true, that, when men become members of a political society, they subject their property, as well as themselves, to the laws, and must either acquiesce in what the laws determine, or leave the society. But justice, and even that particular branch of it which our author always supposes to be the whole, is antecedent to political societies and to their laws; and the intention of these laws is, to be the guardians of justice, and to redress injuries.

As all the works of men are imperfect, human laws may be unjust; which could never be, if justice had its origin from law, as the author seems here to insinuate.

‹442› Justice requires, that a member of a state should submit to the laws of the state, when they require nothing unjust or impious. There may, therefore, be statutory rights and statutory crimes. A statute may create a right which did not before exist, or make that to be criminal which was not so before. But this could never be, if there were not an antecedent obligation upon the subjects to obey the statutes. In like manner, the command of a master may make that to be the servant's duty which, before, was not his duty, and the servant may be chargeable with injustice if he disobeys, because he was under an antecedent obligation to obey his master in lawful things.

We grant, therefore, that particular laws may direct justice and determine property, and sometimes even upon very slight reasons and analogies, or even for no other reason but that it is better that such a point

assembly that they had a choice between utility and justice, they chose the latter. Hume himself used this story in a different but not unrelated context, namely to illustrate his theory that the passions, and hence our moral judgment, are importantly influenced by the imagination. The Athenian assembly was deprived of any details that could have stirred their passions, he suggested, and consequently the 'merit' of their decision was diminished. Adds Hume: 'Philosophers never balance betwixt profit and honesty, because their decisions are general, and neither their passions nor imaginations are interested in the objects' (*Treatise* 2.3.6.4: SBN 425).

63. *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.35: SBN 197.

should be determined by law than that it should be left a dubious subject of contention. But this, far from presenting us with the conclusion which the author would establish, presents us with a contrary conclusion. For all these particular laws and statutes derive their whole obligation and force from a general rule of justice antecedent to them, to wit, That subjects ought to obey the laws of their country.

The author compares the rules of justice with the most frivolous superstitions, and can find no foundation for moral sentiment in the one more than in the other, excepting that justice is requisite to the well-being and existence of society.[64]

It is very true, that, if we examine *mine* and *thine* by the *senses of sight, smell or touch, or scrutinize them by the sciences of medicine, chemistry or physics*, we perceive no difference. But the reason is, that none of these senses or sciences are the judges of right or wrong, or can give any conception of them, any more than the ear of colour, or the eye of sound. Every man of ‹443› common understanding, and every savage, when he applies his moral faculty to those objects, perceives a difference as clearly as he perceives day-light. When that sense or faculty is not consulted, in vain do we consult every other, in a question of right and wrong.

To perceive that justice tends to the good of mankind, would lay no moral obligation upon us to be just, unless we be conscious of a moral obligation to do what tends to the good of mankind. If such a moral obligation be admitted, why may we not admit a stronger obligation to do injury to no man? The last obligation is as easily conceived as the first, and there is as clear evidence of its existence in human nature.

The last argument is a dilemma, and is thus expressed: ‘The dilemma seems obvious. As justice evidently tends to promote public utility, and to support civil society, the sentiment of justice is either derived from our reflecting on that tendency, or, like hunger, thirst and other appetites, resentment, love of life, attachment to offspring, and other passions, arises from a simple original instinct in the human breast, which nature has implanted for like salutary purposes. If the latter be the case, it follows, That property, which is the object of justice, is also distinguished by a simple original instinct, and is not ascertained by any argument or reflection. But who is there that ever heard of such an instinct,’ &c.[65]

64. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.36–8: SBN 198–9.
65. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of* Morals, 3.40: SBN 201.

I doubt not but Mr H UME has heard of a principle called *conscience*, which nature has implanted in the human breast. Whether he will call it a simple original instinct, I know not, as he gives that name to all our appetites and to all our passions. From this principle, I think, we derive the sentiment of justice.

As the eye not only gives us the conception of colours, but makes us perceive one body to have one colour, and another ‹444› body another; and as our reason not only gives us the conception of true and false, but makes us perceive one proposition to be true and another to be false; so our conscience, or moral faculty, not only gives us the conception of honest and dishonest, but makes us perceive one kind of conduct to be honest, another to be dishonest. By this faculty we perceive a merit in honest conduct, and a demerit in dishonest, without regard to public utility.

That these sentiments are not the effect of education or of acquired habits, we have the same reason to conclude, as that our perception of what is true and what false, is not the effect of education or of acquired habits. There have been men who professed to believe, that there is no ground to assent to any one proposition rather than its contrary; but I never yet heard of a man who had the effrontery to profess himself to be under no obligation of honour or honesty, of truth or justice, in his dealings with men.

Nor does this faculty of conscience require *innate ideas of property, and of the various ways of acquiring and transferring it, or innate ideas of kings and senators, of pretors and chancellors and juries* ,[66] any more than the faculty of seeing requires innate ideas of colours, or than the faculty of reasoning requires innate ideas of cones, cylinders and spheres.

‹445›

CHAP. VI.

Of the Nature and Obligation of a Contract.[67]

THE obligation of contracts and promises is a matter so sacred, and of such consequence to human society, that speculations which have a

66. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.41–6: SBN 201–3.
67. The subject of contract figures prominently in Reid's lectures; see especially *Practical Ethics* pp. 54ff. and 136–44, and the commentary to these passages. Reid introduced the question 'Wherein does the nature of a promise consist,

tendency to weaken that obligation, and to perplex men's notions on a subject so plain and so important, ought to meet with the disapprobation of all honest men.

Some such speculations, I think, we have in the third volume of Mr HUME's Treatise of Human Nature, and in his Enquiry into the Principles of Morals; and my design in this chapter is, to offer some observations on the nature of a contract or promise, and on two passages of that author on this subject.

I am far from saying or thinking, that Mr HUME meant to weaken men's obligations to honesty and fair dealing, or that he had not a sense of these obligations himself. It is not the man I impeach, but his writings. Let us think of the first as charitably as we can, while we freely examine the import and tendency of the last.

Although the nature of a contract and of a promise is perfectly understood by all men of common understanding; yet, by attention to the operations of mind signified by these words, we shall be better enabled to judge of the metaphysical subtilties which have been raised about them. A promise and a contract differ so little in what concerns the present disquisition, that the same reasoning (as Mr HUME justly observes) extends to both. [68] In a promise, one party only comes under the obligation, the other acquires a right to the prestation promised. But we give the name of a contract to a transaction in which each ‹446› party comes under an obligation to the other, and each reciprocally acquires a right to what is promised by the other.

The Latin word *pactum* seems to extend to both; and the definition given of it in the Civil Law, and borrowed from ULPIAN, is *Duorum pluriumve in idem placitum consensus*. TITIUS, a modern Civilian, has endeavoured to make this definition more complete, by adding the words, *Obligationis licitè constituendæ vel tollendæ causa datus*. With this addition the definition is, That a contract is the consent of two or more

& whence does its obligation arise' in The Aberdeen Philosophical Society on 12 March 1765, and 'Wherein consists the nature of a contract and does it involve contradictions as Mr. Hume asserts?' in the Glasgow Literary Society on 7 May 1779. See 2/II/14 and parts of 7/VII/2–6.

68. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* 3.2.38, note 13: SBN 199–200; and cf. Appendix 3.7: SBN 306. Hume often treats 'promise' and 'contract' as synonymous terms: see, e.g., *Treatise* 3.2.5.15: SBN 525, 3.2.8.3: SBN 542, 3.2.8.9: SBN 547.

persons in the same thing, given with the intention of constituting or dissolving lawfully some obligation.[69]

This definition is perhaps as good as any other that can be given; yet, I believe, every man will acknowledge, that it gives him no clearer or more distinct notion of a contract than he had before. If it is considered as a strictly logical definition, I believe some objections might be made to it; but I forbear to mention them, because I believe that similar objections might be made to any definition of a contract that can be given.

Nor can it be inferred from this, that the notion of a contract is not perfectly clear in every man come to years of understanding. For this is common to many operations of the mind, that although we understand them perfectly, and are in no danger of confounding them with any thing else; yet we cannot define them according to the rules of logic, by a genus and a specific difference. And when we attempt it, we rather darken than give light to them.

Is there any thing more distinctly understood by all men, than what it is to see, to hear, to remember, to judge? Yet it is the most difficult thing in the world to define these operations according to the rules of logical definition. But it is not more difficult than it is useless.

‹447› Sometimes Philosophers attempt to define them; but, if we examine their definitions, we shall find, that they amount to no more than giving one synonymous word for another, and commonly a worse for a better. So when we define a contract, by calling it a consent, a convention, an agreement, what is this but giving a synonymous word for it, and a word that is neither more expressive nor better understood?

One boy has a top, another a scourge; says the first to the other, If you will lend me your scourge as long as I can keep up my top with it, you shall next have the top as long as you can keep it up. Agreed, says the other. This is a contract perfectly understood by both parties, though they never heard of the definition given by ULPIAN or by TITIUS. And each of them knows, that he is injured if the other breaks the bargain, and that he does wrong if he breaks it himself.

69. This sentence is a literal translation of the two Latin passages. The first passage is from the *Digest* II.xiv.1, §2. The second derives from Gottlieb Gerhard Titius' annotations to his edition of Pufendorf, *De officio hominis et civis juxta legem naturalem*, pp. 261–2. This combination was repeated by Gershom Carmichael in his edition of Pufendorf (see *Natural Rights*, p. 80); and by Hutcheson (see *Philosophiae moralis institutio Compedaria / Short Introduction* , p. 155, and *System*, vol. 2, p. 1).

The operations of the human mind may be divided into two classes, the solitary and the social. [70] As promises and contracts belong to the last class, it may be proper to explain this division.

I call those operations *solitary*, which may be performed by a man in solitude, without intercourse with any other intelligent being.

I call those operations *social*, which necessarily imply social intercourse with some other intelligent being who bears a part in them.

A man may see, and hear, and remember, and judge, and reason; he may deliberate and form purposes, and execute them, without the intervention of any other intelligent being. They are solitary acts. But when he asks a question for information, when he testifies a fact, when he gives a command to his servant, when he makes a promise, or enters into a contract, these are ‹448› social acts of mind, and can have no existence without the intervention of some other intelligent being, who acts a part in them. Between the operations of the mind, which, for want of a more proper name, I have called *solitary*, and those I have called *social*, there is this very remarkable distinction, that, in the solitary, the expression of them by words, or any other sensible sign, is accidental. They may exist, and be complete, without being expressed, without being known to any other person. But, in the social operations, the expression is essential. They cannot exist without being expressed by words or signs, and known to the other party.

If nature had not made man capable of such social operations of mind, and furnished him with a language to express them, he might think, and reason, and deliberate, and will; he might have desires and aversions, joy and sorrow; in a word, he might exert all those operations of mind, which the writers in logic and pneumatology have so copiously described; but, at the same time, he would still be a solitary being, even when in a crowd; it would be impossible for him to put a question, or give a command, to ask a favour, or testify a fact, to make a promise or a bargain.

I take it to be the common opinion of Philosophers, That the social operations of the human mind are not specifically different from the solitary, and that they are only various modifications or compositions of our solitary operations, and may be resolved into them.

It is, for this reason probably, that, in enumerating the operations of the mind, the solitary only are mentioned, and no notice at all taken of

70. Cf. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, Essay I, Chap. 8; *Practical Ethics*, pp. 277–8, note 4; and *Logic, Rhetoric and Fine Arts*, pp. 40–8.

the social, though they are familiar to every man, and have names in all languages.

I apprehend, however, it will be found extremely difficult, if not impossible, to resolve our social operations into any modifi‹449›cation or composition of the solitary: And that an attempt to do this, would prove as ineffectual as the attempts that have been made to resolve all our social affections into the selfish. The social operations appear to be as simple in their nature as the solitary. They are found in every individual of the species, even before the use of reason.

The power which man has of holding social intercourse with his kind, by asking and refusing, threatening and supplicating, commanding and obeying, testifying and promising, must either be a distinct faculty given by our Maker, and a part of our constitution, like the powers of seeing, and hearing, or it must be a human invention. If men have invented this art of social intercourse, it must follow, that every individual of the species must have invented it for himself. It cannot be taught; for though, when once carried to a certain pitch, it may be improved by teaching; yet it is impossible it can begin in that way, because all teaching supposes a social intercourse and language already established between the teacher and the learner. This intercourse must, from the very first, be carried on by sensible signs; for the thoughts of other men can be discovered in no other way. I think it is likewise evident, that this intercourse, in its beginning at least, must be carried on by natural signs, whose meaning is understood by both parties, previous to all compact or agreement. For there can be no compact without signs, nor without social intercourse.

I apprehend therefore, that the social intercourse of mankind, consisting of those social operations which I have mentioned, is the exercise of a faculty appropriated to that purpose, which is the gift of GOD, no less than the powers of seeing and hearing. And that, in order to carry on this intercourse, GOD has given to man a natural language, by which his social operations are expressed, and, without which, the artificial languages of articulate sounds, and of writing, could never have been invented by human art.

‹450› The signs in this natural language are looks, changes of the features, modulations of the voice, and gestures of the body. All men understand this language without instruction, and all men can use it in some degree. But they are most expert in it who use it most. It makes a great part of the language of savages, and therefore they are more expert in the use of natural signs than the civilized.

The language of dumb persons is mostly formed of natural signs; and they are all great adepts in this language of nature. All that we call action and pronunciation, in the most perfect orator, and the most admired actor, is nothing else but superadding the language of nature to the language of articulate sounds. The pantomimes among the Romans carried it to the highest pitch of perfection. For they could act parts of comedies and tragedies in dumb-shew, so as to be understood, not only by those who were accustomed to this entertainment, but by all the strangers that came to Rome, from all the corners of the earth.

For it may be observed of this natural language, (and nothing more clearly demonstrates it to be a part of the human constitution,) that although it require practice and study to enable a man to express his sentiments by it in the most perfect manner; yet it requires neither study nor practice in the spectator to understand it. The knowledge of it was before latent in the mind, and we no sooner see it, than we immediately recognise it, as we do an acquaintance whom we had long forgot, and could not have described; but no sooner do we see him, than we know for certain that he is the very man.

This knowledge, in all mankind, of the natural signs of men's thoughts and sentiments, is indeed so like to reminiscence, that it ‹451› seems to have led PLATO to conceive all human knowledge to be of that kind.[71]

It is not by reasoning, that all mankind know, that an open countenance, and a placid eye, is a sign of amity; that a contracted brow, and a fierce look, is the sign of anger. It is not from reason that we learn to know the natural signs of consenting and refusing, of affirming and denying, of threatening and supplicating.

No man can perceive any necessary connection between the signs of such operations, and the things signified by them. But we are so formed by the Author of our nature, that the operations themselves become visible, as it were, by their natural signs. This knowledge resembles reminiscence, in this respect, that it is immediate. We form the conclusion with great assurance, without knowing any premises from which it may be drawn by reasoning.

It would lead us too far from the intention of the present enquiry, to consider more particularly, in what degree the social intercourse is natural, and a part of our constitution; how far it is of human invention.

It is sufficient to observe, that this intercourse of human minds, by

71. See in particular the *Meno*.

which their thoughts and sentiments are exchanged, and their souls mingle together as it were, is common to the whole species from infancy.

Like our other powers, its first beginnings are weak, and scarcely perceptible. But, it is a certain fact, that we can perceive some communication of sentiments between the nurse and her nursling, before it is a month old. And I doubt not, but that, if both had grown out of the earth, and had never seen another human face, they would be able in a few years to converse together.

‹452› There appears indeed to be some degree of social intercourse among brute-animals, and between some of them and man. A dog exults in the caresses of his master, and is humbled at his displeasure. But there are two operations of the social kind, of which the brute-animals seem to be altogether incapable. They can neither plight their veracity by testimony, nor their fidelity by any engagement or promise. If nature had made them capable of these operations, they would have had a language to express them by, as man has: But of this we see no appearance.

A fox is said to use stratagems, but he cannot lie; because he cannot give his testimony, or plight his veracity. A dog is said to be faithful to his master; but no more is meant but that he is affectionate, for he never came under any engagement. I see no evidence, that any brute-animal is capable of either giving testimony, or making a promise.

A dumb man cannot speak any more than a fox or a dog; but he can give his testimony by signs as early in life as other men can do by words. He knows what a lie is as early as other men, and hates it as much. He can plight his faith, and is sensible of the obligation of a promise or contract.

It is therefore a prerogative of man, that he can communicate his knowledge of facts by testimony, and enter into engagements by promise or contract. GOD has given him these powers by a part of his constitution, which distinguishes him from all brute-animals. And whether they are original powers, or resolvable into other original powers, it is evident that they spring up in the human mind at an early period of life, and are found in every individual of the species, whether savage or civilized.

These prerogative powers of man, like all his other powers, must be given for some end, and for a good end. And if we consider a little farther the economy of nature, in relation to this part of the human constitution, we shall perceive the wis ‹453›dom of Nature in the structure of it, and discover clearly our duty in consequence of it.

It is evident, in the *first* place, that if no credit was given to testimony,

if there was no reliance upon promises, they would answer no end at all, not even that of deceiving.

Secondly, Supposing men disposed by some principle in their nature to rely on declarations and promises; yet if men found in experience, that there was no fidelity on the other part in making and in keeping them, no man of common understanding would trust to them, and so they would become useless.

Hence it appears, *thirdly*, That this power of giving testimony, and of promising, can answer no end in society, unless there be a considerable degree, both of fidelity on the one part, and of trust on the other. These two must stand or fall together, and one of them cannot possibly subsist without the other.

Fourthly, It may be observed, that fidelity in declarations and promises, and its counter-part, trust and reliance upon them, form a system of social intercourse, the most amiable, the most useful, that can be among men. Without fidelity and trust, there can be no human society. There never was a society, even of savages, nay even of robbers or pirates, in which there was not a great degree of veracity and of fidelity among themselves. Without it man would be the most dissocial animal that GOD has made. His state would be in reality what HOBBES conceived the state of nature to be, a state of war of every man against every man; nor could this war ever terminate in peace.

It may be observed, in the *fifth* place, that man is evidently made for living in society. His social affections shew this as evidently, as that the eye was made for seeing. His social operations, particularly those of testifying and promising, make it no less evident.

‹454› From these observations it follows, that if no provision were made by nature, to engage men to fidelity in declarations and promises, human nature would be a contradiction to itself, made for an end, yet without the necessary means of attaining it. As if the species had been furnished with good eyes, but without the power of opening their eye-lids. There are no blunders of this kind in the works of GOD. Wherever there is an end intended, the means are admirably fitted for the attainment of it; and so we find it to be in the case before us.

For we see that children, as soon as they are capable of understanding declarations and promises, are led by their constitution to rely upon them. They are no less led by constitution to veracity and candour, on their own part. Nor do they ever deviate from this road of truth and sincerity, until corrupted by bad example and bad company. This disposition to

sincerity in themselves, and to give credit to others, whether we call it *instinct*, or whatever name we give it, must be considered as the effect of their constitution.

So that the things essential to human society, I mean good faith on the one part, and trust on the other, are formed by nature in the minds of children, before they are capable of knowing their utility, or being influenced by considerations either of duty or interest.

When we grow up so far as to have the conception of a right and a wrong in conduct, the turpitude of lying, falsehood, and dishonesty, is discerned, not by any train of reasoning, but by an immediate perception. For we see that every man disapproves it in others, even those who are conscious of it in themselves.

Every man thinks himself injured and ill used, and feels resentment, when he is imposed upon by it. Every man takes it as a reproach when falsehood is imputed to him. These are ‹455› the clearest evidences, that all men disapprove of falsehood, when their judgment is not biassed.

I know of no evidence that has been given of any nation so rude, as not to have these sentiments. It is certain that dumb people have them, and discover them about the same period of life, in which they appear in those who speak. And it may reasonably be thought, that dumb persons, at that time of life, have had as little advantage, with regard to morals, from their education, as the greatest savages.

Every man come to years of reflection, when he pledges his veracity or fidelity, thinks he has a right to be credited, and is affronted if he is not. But there cannot be a shadow of right to be credited, unless there be an obligation to good faith. For right on one hand, necessarily implies obligation on the other.

When we see that in the most savage state, that ever was known of the human race, men have always lived in societies greater or less, this of itself is a proof from fact, that they have had that sense of their obligation to fidelity, without which no human society can subsist.

From these observations, I think, it appears very evident, that as fidelity on one part, and trust on the other, are essential to that intercourse of men, which we call human society; so the Author of our nature has made wise provision for perpetuating them among men, in that degree that is necessary to human society, in all the different periods of human life, and in all the stages of human improvement and degeneracy.

In early years, we have an innate disposition to them. In riper years, we feel our obligation to fidelity as much as to any moral duty whatsoever.

‹456› Nor is it necessary to mention the collateral inducements to this virtue, from considerations of prudence, which are obvious to every man that reflects. Such as, that it creates trust, the most effectual engine of human power; that it requires no artifice or concealment; dreads no detection; that it inspires courage and magnanimity, and is the natural ally of every virtue; so that there is no virtue whatsoever, to which our natural obligation appears more strong or more apparent.

An observation or two, with regard to the nature of a contract, will be sufficient for the present purpose.

It is obvious that the prestation promised must be understood by both parties. One party engages to do such a thing, another accepts of this engagement. An engagement to do, one does not know what, can neither be made nor accepted. It is no less obvious, that a contract is a voluntary transaction.

But it ought to be observed, that the will, which is essential to a contract, is only a will to engage, or to become bound. We must beware of confounding this will, with a will to perform what we have engaged. The last can signify nothing else than an intention and fixed purpose to do what we have engaged to do. The will to become bound, and to confer a right upon the other party, is indeed the very essence of a contract; but the purpose of fulfilling our engagement, is no part of the contract at all.

A purpose is a solitary act of mind, which lays no obligation on the person, nor confers any right on another. A fraudulent person may contract with a fixed purpose of not performing his engagements. But this purpose makes no change with regard to his obligation. He is as much bound as the honest man, who contracts with a fixed purpose of performing.

As the contract is binding without any regard to the purpose, ‹457› so there may be a purpose without any contract. A purpose is no contract, even when it is declared to the person for whose benefit it is intended. I may say to a man, I intend to do such a thing for your benefit, but I come under no engagement. Every man understands the meaning of this speech, and sees no contradiction in it: Whereas, if a purpose declared were the same thing with a contract, such a speech would be a contradiction, and would be the same as if one should say, I promise to do such a thing, but I do not promise.

All this is so plain to every man of common sense, that it would have been unnecessary to be mentioned, had not so acute a man as Mr Hume grounded some of the contradictions he finds in a contract, upon

confounding a will to engage in a contract with a will or purpose to perform the engagement.

I come now to consider the speculations of that Author with regard to contracts.

In order to support a favourite notion of his own, That justice is not a natural but an artificial virtue, and that it derives its whole merit from its utility, he has laid down some principles which, I think, have a tendency to subvert all faith and fair-dealing among mankind.

In the third volume of the Treatise of Human Nature, p. 40. he lays it down as an undoubted maxim, That no action can be virtuous or morally good, unless there be, in human nature, some motive to produce it, distinct from its morality. [72] Let us apply this undoubted maxim in an instance or two. If a man keeps his word, from this sole motive, that he ought to do so, this is no virtuous or morally good action. If a man pays his debt from this motive, that justice requires this of him, this is no virtuous or morally good action. If a judge or an arbiter gives a sentence in a cause, from no other motive but regard to ‹458› justice, this is no virtuous or morally good action. These appear to me to be shocking absurdities, which no metaphysical subtilty can ever justify.

Nothing is more evident than that every human action takes its denomination and its moral nature from the motive from which it is performed. That is a benevolent action, which is done from benevolence. That is an act of gratitude which is done from a sentiment of gratitude. That is an act of obedience to GOD, which is done from a regard to his command. And, in general, that is an act of virtue which is done from a regard to virtue.

Virtuous actions are so far from needing other motives, besides their being virtuous, to give them merit, that their merit is then greatest and most conspicuous, when every motive that can be put in the opposite scale is outweighed by the sole consideration of their being our duty.

This maxim, therefore, of Mr HUME, That no action can be virtuous or morally good, unless there be some motive to produce it distinct from its morality, is so far from being undoubtedly true, that it is undoubtedly false. It was never, so far as I know, maintained by any moralist, but by the Epicureans; and it savours of the very dregs of that sect. It agrees well with the principles of those who maintained, that virtue is an empty name, and that it is entitled to no regard, but in as far as it ministers to pleasure or profit.

72. Reid quotes from the *Treatise*, 3.2.1.7: SBN 479.

I believe the author of this maxim acted upon better moral principles than he wrote; and that what CICERO says of EPICURUS, may be applied to him: *Redarguitur ipse a sese, vincunturque scripta ejus probitate ipsius et moribus, et ut alii existimantur dicere melius quam facere, sic ille mihi videtur facere melius quam dicere*.[73]

‹459› But let us see how he applies this maxim to contracts. I give you his words from the place formerly cited. 'I suppose,' says he, 'a person to have lent me a sum of money, on condition that it be restored in a few days; and, after the expiration of the term agreed on, he demands the sum. I ask, what reason or motive have I to restore the money? It will perhaps be said, that my regard to justice and abhorrence of villany and knavery, are sufficient reasons for me, if I have the least grain of honesty, or sense of duty and obligation. And this answer, no doubt, is just and satisfactory to man in his civilized state, and when trained up according to a certain discipline and education. But, in his rude and more natural condition, if you are pleased to call such a condition natural, this answer would be rejected as perfectly unintelligible and sophistical.'[74]

The doctrine we are taught in this passage is this, That though a man, in a civilized state, and when trained up according to a certain discipline and education, may have a regard to justice, and an abhorrence of villany and knavery, and some sense of duty and obligation; yet to a man in his rude and more natural condition, the considerations of honesty, justice, duty and obligation, will be perfectly unintelligible and sophistical. And this is brought as an argument to shew, that justice is not a natural but an artificial virtue.

I shall offer some observations on this argument.

1. Although it may be true, that what is unintelligible to man in his rude state may be intelligible to him in his civilized state, I cannot conceive, that what is sophistical in the rude state should change its nature, and become just reasoning, when man is more improved. What is a sophism, will always be so; nor can any change in the state of the person who judges, make that to be just reasoning which before was sophistical. Mr

73. Transl. '... he is his own refutation; his writings are disproved by the uprightness of his character; ... and most men's words are thought to be better than their deeds; his deeds on the contrary seem to me better than his words.' Reid has pieced together two passages from Cicero, *De finibus*, namely II.xxxi (99) and II.xxv (81). In the last sentence, Reid has changed the original plural to the singular in order to refer to Epicurus rather than to the Epicureans in general, as Cicero does. The translation has been altered accordingly.

74. *Treatise* 3.3.2.9: SBN 479–80.

‹460› HUME's argument requires, that to man in his rude state, the motives to justice and honesty should not only appear to be sophistical, but should really be so. If the motives were just in themselves, then justice would be a natural virtue, although the rude man, by an error of his judgment, thought otherwise. But if justice be not a natural virtue, which is the point Mr HUME intends to prove, then every argument, by which man in his natural state may be urged to it, must be a sophism in reality, and not in appearance only; and the effect of discipline and education in the civilized state can only be to make those motives to justice appear just and satisfactory, which, in their own nature, are sophistical.

2. It were to be wished, that this ingenious Author had shewn us, why that state of man, in which the obligation to honesty, and an abhorrence of villany, appear perfectly unintelligible and sophistical, should be his *more natural state*.

It is the nature of human society to be progressive, as much as it is the nature of the individual. In the individual, the state of infancy leads to that of childhood, childhood to youth, youth to manhood, and manhood to old age. If one should say, that the state of infancy is a more natural state than that of manhood or of old age, I am apt to think, that this would be words without any meaning. In like manner, in human society, there is a natural progress from rudeness to civilization, from ignorance to knowledge. [75] What period of this progress shall we call man's natural state? To me they appear all equally natural. Every state of society is equally natural, wherein men have access to exert their natural powers about their proper objects, and to improve those powers by the means which their situation affords.

Mr HUME, indeed, shews some timidity in affirming the rude state to be the more natural state of man; and, therefore, adds ‹461› this qualifying parenthesis, If you are pleased to call such a condition natural.

But it ought to be observed, That if the premises of his argument be weakened by this clause, the same weakness must be communicated to the conclusion; and the conclusion, according to the rules of good reason-

75. Cf. the fragmentary manuscript for this discussion, where Reid specifies: 'The various States of Men from the rudest to the most civilized have by some ingenious Authors been distinguished into four. 1 The State of Hunters & fishers 2 The State of Shepherds. 3 The State of Agriculture & 4 the Commercial State' (VII/7/5, 2). Reid is clearly referring to the theory of four societal stages put forward by Adam Smith, Lord Kames and John Millar, Professor of Law in Glasgow.

ing, ought to be, That justice is an artificial virtue, if you be pleased to call it artificial.

3. It were likewise to be wished, that Mr H UME had shewn from fact, that there ever did exist such a state of man as that which he calls his more natural state. It is a state wherein a man borrows a sum of money, on the condition that he is to restore it in a few days; yet when the time of payment comes, his obligation to repay what he borrowed is perfectly unintelligible and sophistical. It would have been proper to have given at least a single instance of some tribe of the human race that was found to be in this natural state. If no such instance can be given, it is probably a state merely imaginary; like that state, which some have imagined, wherein men were *Ouran Outangs*, or wherein they were fishes with tails.[76]

Indeed, such a state seems impossible. That a man should lend without any conception of his having a right to be repaid; or that a man should borrow on the condition of paying in a few days, and yet have no con - ception of his obligation, seems to me to involve a contradiction.

I grant, that a humane man may lend without any expectation of being repaid; but that he should lend without any conception of a right to be repaid, is a contradiction. In like manner, a fraudulent man may borrow without an intention of paying back; but that he could borrow, while an obligation to repay is perfectly unintelligible to him, this is a contradiction.

‹462› The same author, in his Enquiry into the Principles of Morals, sect. 3. treating of the same subject, has the following note:

‘’Tis evident, that the will or consent alone never transfers property, nor causes the obligation of a promise, (for the same reasoning extends to both) but the will must be expressed by words or signs, in order to impose a tie upon any man. The expression being once brought in as subservient to the will, soon becomes the principal part of the promise; nor will a man

76. There was considerable uncertainty about the different species of higher apes, and ‘orang-utan’ could mean all of them. Reid is referring to Rousseau’s dis - cussion about the similarities between ‘orang-utans’ and humans in Note X to the *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, and especially to James Burnet, Lord Monboddo’s argument that orang-utans were primitive humans (not that humans were orang-utans) in his *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, the 2nd edn. of vol. I, Book II, Chaps. 4–5; cf. *Logic, Rhetoric and Fine Arts*, p. 47. The fish with tails are perhaps a reference to the ideas of the pre-Socratic philosopher Anaximander; see, e.g., the account in Plutarch, *Symposium* (*Table-Talk*) VIII, 730E.

be less bound by his word, though he secretly give a different direction to his intention, and with-hold the assent of his mind. But though the expression makes, on most occasions, the whole of the promise; yet it does not always so; and one who should make use of any expression, of which he knows not the meaning, and which he uses without any sense of the consequences, would not certainly be bound by it. Nay, though he know its meaning; yet if he uses it in jest only, and with such signs as shew evidently he has no serious intention of binding himself, he would not be under any obligation of performance; but it is necessary that the words be a perfect expression of the will, without any contrary signs. Nay, even this we must not carry so far as to imagine, that one whom, from our quickness of understanding, we conjecture to have an intention of deceiving us, is not bound by his expression or verbal promise, if we accept of it, but must limit this conclusion to those cases, where the signs are of a different nature from those of deceit. All these contradictions are easily accounted for, if justice arises entirely from its usefulness to society, but will never be explained on any other hypothesis.'[77]

Here we have the opinion of this grave moralist and acute meta - physician, that the principles of honesty and fidelity are at bottom a bundle of contradictions. This is one part of his ‹463› moral system which, I cannot help thinking, borders upon licentiousness. It surely tends to give a very unfavourable notion of that cardinal virtue, without which no man has a title to be called an honest man. What regard can a man pay to the virtue of fidelity, who believes that its essential rules contradict each other? Can a man be bound by contradictory rules of conduct? No more, surely, than he can be bound to believe contradictory principles.

He tells us, 'That all these contradictions are easily accounted for, if justice arises entirely from its usefulness to society, but will never be explained upon any other hypothesis.'

I know not indeed what is meant by accounting for contradictions, or explaining them. I apprehend, that no hypothesis can make that which is a contradiction to be no contradiction. However, without attempting to account for these contradictions upon his own hypothesis, he pronounces, in a decisive tone, that they will never be explained upon any other hypothesis.

What if it shall appear, that the contradictions mentioned in this paragraph, do all take their rise from two capital mistakes the author has made

77. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3.38 note: SBN 199–200 note.

with regard to the nature of promises and contracts; and if, when these are corrected, there shall not appear a shadow of contradiction in the cases put by him?

The first mistake is, That a promise is some kind of will, consent or intention, which may be expressed, or may not be expressed. This is to mistake the nature of a promise: For no will, no consent or intention, that is not expressed, is a promise. A promise, being a social transaction between two parties, without being expressed can have no existence.

Another capital mistake that runs though the passage cited ‹464› is, That this will, consent or intention, which makes a promise, is a will or intention to perform what we promise. Every man knows that there may be a fraudulent promise, made without intention of performing. But the intention to perform the promise, or not to perform it, whether the intention be known to the other party or not, makes no part of the promise, it is a solitary act of the mind, and can neither constitute nor dissolve an obligation. What makes a promise is, that it be expressed to the other party with understanding, and with an intention to become bound, and that it be accepted by him.

Carrying these remarks along with us, let us review the passage cited.

First, He observes, that the will or consent alone does not cause the obligation of a promise, but it must be expressed.

I answer: The will not expressed is not a promise; and is it a contradiction that that which is not a promise should not cause the obligation of a promise? He goes on: The expression being once brought in as subservient to the will soon *becomes* a principal part of the promise. Here it is supposed, that the expression was not originally a constituent part of the promise, but it soon *becomes* such. It is brought in to aid and be subservient to the promise which was made before by the will. If Mr HUME had considered, that it is the expression accompanied with understanding and will to become bound, that constitutes a promise, he would never have said, that the expression soon becomes a part, and is brought in as subservient.

He adds, Nor will a man be less bound by his word, though he secretly gives a different direction to his intention, and with-holds the assent of his mind.

The case here put needs some explication. Either it means, ‹465› that the man knowingly and voluntarily gives his word, without any intention of giving his word; or that he gives it without the intention of keeping it, and performing what he promises. The last of these is indeed a possible

case, and is, I apprehend, what Mr HUME means. But the intention of keeping his promise is no part of the promise, nor does it in the least affect the obligation of it, as we have often observed.

If the Author meant that the man may knowingly and voluntarily give his word, without the intention of giving his word, this is impossible: For such is the nature of all social acts of the mind, that, as they cannot be without being expressed, so they cannot be expressed knowingly and willingly, but they must be. If a man puts a question knowingly and willingly, it is impossible that he should at the same time will not to put it. If he gives a command knowingly and willingly, it is impossible that he should at the same time will not to give it. We cannot have contrary wills at the same time. And, in like manner, if a man knowingly and willingly becomes bound by a promise, it is impossible that he should at the same time will not to be bound.

To suppose, therefore, that when a man knowingly and willingly gives his word, he with-holds that will and intention which makes a promise, is indeed a contradiction; but the contradiction is not in the nature of the promise, but in the case supposed by Mr HUME.

He adds, though the expression, for the most part, makes the whole of the promise, it does not always so.

I answer, That the expression, if it is not accompanied with understanding, and will to engage, never makes a promise. The Author here assumes a postulate, which no body ever granted, and which can only be grounded on the impossible supposition made in the former sentence. And as there can be no promise without knowledge, and will to engage, is it marvellous that ‹466› words which are not understood, or words spoken in jest, and without any intention to become bound, should not have the effect of a promise?

The last case put by Mr HUME, is that of a man who promises fraudulently with an intention not to perform, and whose fraudulent intention is discovered by the other party, who, notwithstanding, accepts the promise. He is bound, says Mr HUME, by his verbal promise. Undoubtedly he is bound, because an intention not to perform the promise, whether known to the other party or not, makes no part of the promise, nor affects its obligation, as has been repeatedly observed.

From what has been said, I think it evident, that to one who attends to the nature of a promise or contract, there is not the least appearance of contradiction in the principles of morality relating to contracts.

It would indeed appear wonderful, that such a man as Mr HUME

should have imposed upon himself in so plain a matter, if we did not see frequent instances of ingenious men, whose zeal in supporting a favourite hypothesis, darkens their understanding, and hinders them from seeing what is before their eyes.

‹467›

CHAP. VII.

That moral Approbation implies a real Judgment.[78]

THE approbation of good actions, and disapprobation of bad, are so familiar to every man come to years of understanding, that it seems strange there should be any dispute about their nature.

Whether we reflect upon our own conduct, or attend to the conduct of others with whom we live, or of whom we hear or read, we cannot help approving of some things, disapproving of others, and regarding many with perfect indifference.

These operations of our minds we are conscious of every day, and almost every hour we live. Men of ripe understanding are capable of reflecting upon them, and of attending to what passes in their own thoughts on such occasions; yet, for half a century, it has been a serious dispute among Philosophers, what this approbation and disapprobation is, Whether there be a real judgment included in it, which, like all other judgments, must be true or false; or, Whether it include no more but some agreeable or uneasy feeling, in the person who approves or disapproves.

Mr HUME observes very justly, that this is a controversy *started of late*.[79] Before the modern system of ideas and impressions was introduced, nothing would have appeared more absurd, than to say, That when I condemn a man for what he has done, I pass no judgment at all about the man, but only express some uneasy feeling in myself.

Nor did the new system produce this discovery at once, but gradually,

78. There does not seem to be a record of this as a separate topic in the Aberdeen Philosophical Society (cf. note 12 to Chap. 3 of this Essay), but it may have been included in the presentation that formed the basis for Chap. 4 in this Essay. Reid is also on record as having discussed the question 'Whether moral obli gations are discerned by reason or sentiment?' in the Glasgow Literary Society on 3 March 1769. The preserved manuscript background is largely shared; see note 19, p. 290. For a draft directly towards this chapter, see 7/V/10, 1–4.

79. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 1.3: SBN 170.

by several steps, according as its consequences were ‹468› more accurately traced, and its spirit more thoroughly imbibed by successive Philosophers.

DES CARTES and Mr LOCKE went no farther than to maintain that the secondary qualities of body, heat and cold, sound, colour, taste and smell, which we perceive and judge to be in the external object, are mere feelings or sensations in our minds, there being nothing in bodies themselves to which these names can be applied; and that the office of the external senses is not to judge of external things, but only to give us ideas or sensations, from which we are by reasoning to deduce the existence of a material world without us, as well as we can.[80]

ARTHUR COLLIER and Bishop BERKELEY discovered, from the same principles, that the primary, as well as the secondary, qualities of bodies, such as extension, figure, solidity, motion, are only sensations in our minds; and therefore, that there is no material world without us at all.

The same philosophy, when it came to be applied to matters of taste, discovered that beauty and deformity are not any thing in the objects, to which men, from the beginning of the world, ascribed them, but certain feelings in the mind of the spectator.[81]

The next step was an easy consequence from all the preceding, that moral approbation and disapprobation are not judgments, which must be true or false, but barely, agreeable and uneasy feelings or sensations.

Mr HUME made the last step in this progress, and crowned the system by what he calls his *hypothesis*, to wit, That belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our nature.[82]

Beyond this I think no man can go in this track; sensation or ‹469› feeling is all, and what is left to the cogitative part of our nature, I am not able to comprehend.

I have had occasion to consider each of these paradoxes, excepting that which relates to morals, in *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, and, though they be strictly connected with each other, and with the system

80. Reid gives detailed analyses of the issues referred to in this and the following paragraph in *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, Essay II. He compares moral perception to sensation in 7/V/18, 2.

81. This is the subject of *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, Essay VIII, Chap. 4, where Francis Hutcheson's *Inquiry*, especially I.1, is singled out for criticism on pp. 593–4.

82. See *Treatise*, 1.4.1.8: SBN 183. For a work with which Reid was well acquainted and in which this 'last step' was taken in terms of secondary qualities, see Hartley, *Observations* II, p. 60.

which has produced them, I have attempted to shew, that they are inconsistent with just notions of our intellectual powers, no less than they are with the common sense and common language of mankind. And this, I think, will likewise appear with regard to the conclusion relating to morals, to wit, That moral approbation is only an agreeable feeling, and not a real judgment.

To prevent ambiguity as much as possible, let us attend to the meaning of *feeling* and of *judgment*. These operations of the mind, perhaps, cannot be logically defined; but they are well understood, and easily distinguished, by their properties and adjuncts.

Feeling, or sensation, seems to be the lowest degree of animation we can conceive. We give the name of *animal* to every being that feels pain or pleasure; and this seems to be the boundary between the inanimate and animal creation.

We know no being of so low a rank in the creation of GOD, as to possess this animal power only without any other.

We commonly distinguish *feeling* from *thinking*, because it hardly deserves the name; and though it be, in a more general sense, a species of thought, is least removed from the passive and inert state of things inanimate.

A feeling must be agreeable, or uneasy, or indifferent. It may be weak or strong. It is expressed in language either by a single word, or by such a contexture of words as may be the ‹470› subject or predicate of a proposition, but such as cannot by themselves make a proposition. For it implies neither affirmation nor negation; and therefore cannot have the qualities of true or false, which distinguish propositions from all other forms of speech, and judgments from all other acts of the mind.

That I have such a feeling, is indeed an affirmative proposition, and expresses testimony grounded upon an intuitive judgment. But the feeling is only one term of this proposition; and it can only make a proposition when joined with another term, by a verb affirming or denying.

As feeling distinguishes the animal nature from the inanimate; so judging seems to distinguish the rational nature from the merely animal.

Though judgment in general is expressed by one word in language, as the most complex operations of the mind may be; yet a particular judgment can only be expressed by a sentence, and by that kind of sentence which Logicians call a *proposition*, in which there must necessarily be a verb in the indicative mood, either expressed or understood.

Every judgment must necessarily be true or false, and the same may be

said of the proposition which expresses it. It is a determination of the understanding, with regard to what is true, or false, or dubious.

In judgment, we can distinguish the object about which we judge, from the act of the mind in judging of that object. In mere feeling there is no such distinction. The object of judgment must be expressed by a proposition; and belief, disbelief or doubt, always accompanies the judgment we form. If we judge the proposition to be true, we must believe it; if we judge it to be false, we must disbelieve it; and if we be uncertain whether it be true or false, we must doubt.

‹471› The *toothach*, the *headach*, are words which express uneasy feelings; but to say that they express a judgment would be ridiculous.

That the sun is greater than the earth , is a proposition, and therefore the object of judgment; and when affirmed or denied, believed or disbelieved, or doubted, it expresses judgment; but to say that it expresses only a feeling in the mind of him that believes it, would be ridiculous.

These two operations of mind, when we consider them separately, are very different, and easily distinguished. When we feel without judging, or judge without feeling, it is impossible, without very gross inattention, to mistake the one for the other.

But in many operations of the mind, both are inseparably conjoined under one name; and when we are not aware that the operation is complex, we may take one ingredient to be the whole, and overlook the other.

In former ages, that moral power, by which human actions ought to be regulated, was called *reason*, and considered both by Philosophers, and by the vulgar, as the power of judging what we ought, and what we ought not to do.

This is very fully expressed by Mr H UME, in his Treatise of Human Nature, Book II. Part III. §3. ‘Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates. Every rational creature, ’tis said, is obliged to regulate his actions by reason; and if any other motive or principle challenge the direction of his conduct, he ought to oppose it, till it be entirely subdued, or, at least, brought to a conformity to that superior principle. On this ‹472› method of thinking, the greatest part of moral philosophy, ancient and modern, seems to be founded.’[83]

83. *Treatise*, 2.3.3.1 : SBN 413.

That those Philosophers attended chiefly to the judging power of our moral faculty, appears from the names they gave to its operations, and from the whole of their language concerning it.

The modern philosophy has led men to attend chiefly to their sensations and feelings, and thereby to resolve into mere feeling, complex acts of the mind, of which feeling is only one ingredient.

I had occasion, in the preceding Essays, to observe, That several operations of the mind, to which we give one name, and consider as one act, are compounded of more simple acts inseparably united in our constitution, and that in these, sensation or feeling often makes one ingredient.[84]

Thus the appetites of hunger and thirst are compounded of an uneasy sensation, and the desire of food or drink. In our benevolent affections, there is both an agreeable feeling, and a desire of happiness to the object of our affection; and malevolent affections have ingredients of a contrary nature.

In these instances, sensation or feeling is inseparably conjoined with desire. In other instances, we find sensation inseparably conjoined with judgment or belief, and that in two different ways. In some instances, the judgment or belief seems to be the consequence of the sensation, and to be regulated by it. In other instances, the sensation is the consequence of the judgment.

When we perceive an external object by our senses, we have a sensation conjoined with a firm belief of the existence and ‹473› sensible qualities of the external object. Nor has all the subtilty of metaphysics been able to disjoin what nature has conjoined in our constitution. DES CARTES and LOCKE endeavoured, by reasoning, to deduce the existence of external objects from our sensations, but in vain. Subsequent Philosophers, finding no reason for this connection, endeavoured to throw off the belief of external objects as being unreasonable; but this attempt is no less vain. Nature has doomed us to believe the testimony of our senses, whether we can give a good reason for doing so or not.

In this instance, the belief or judgment is the consequence of the sensation, as the sensation is the consequence of the impression made on the organ of sense.

But in most of the operations of mind in which judgment or belief is

84. For the cases mentioned in the following paragraph, see above, Essay III, Part 2, Chaps. 1, 3 and 5.

combined with feeling, the feeling is the consequence of the judgment, and is regulated by it.

Thus, an account of the good conduct of a friend at a distance gives me a very agreeable feeling, and a contrary account would give me a very uneasy feeling; but these feelings depend entirely upon my belief of the report.

In hope, there is an agreeable feeling, depending upon the belief or expectation of good to come: Fear is made up of contrary ingredients; in both, the feeling is regulated by the degree of belief.

In the respect we bear to the worthy, and in our contempt of the worthless, there is both judgment and feeling, and the last depends entirely upon the first.

The same may be said of gratitude for good offices and resentment of injuries.

‹474› Let me now consider how I am affected when I see a man exerting himself nobly in a good cause. I am conscious that the effect of his conduct on my mind is complex, though it may be called by one name. I look up to his virtue, I approve, I admire it. In doing so, I have pleasure indeed, or an agreeable feeling; this is granted. But I find myself interested in his success and in his fame. This is affection; it is love and esteem, which is more than mere feeling. The man is the object of this esteem; but in mere feeling there is no object.

I am likewise conscious, that this agreeable feeling in me, and this esteem of him, depend entirely upon the judgment I form of his conduct. I judge that this conduct merits esteem; and, while I thus judge, I cannot but esteem him, and contemplate his conduct with pleasure. Persuade me that he was bribed, or that he acted from some mercenary or bad motive, immediately my esteem and my agreeable feeling vanish.

In the approbation of a good action, therefore, there is feeling indeed, but there is also esteem of the agent; and both the feeling and the esteem depend upon the judgment we form of his conduct.

When I exercise my moral faculty about my own actions or those of other men, I am conscious that I judge as well as feel. I accuse and excuse, I acquit and condemn, I assent and dissent, I believe and disbelieve, and doubt. These are acts of judgment, and not feelings.

Every determination of the understanding, with regard to what is true or false, is judgment. That I ought not to steal, or to kill, or to bear false witness, are propositions, of the truth of which I am as well convinced as of any proposition in EUCLID. I am conscious that I judge them to be true

propositions; and ‹475› my consciousness makes all other arguments unnecessary, with regard to the operations of my own mind.

That other men judge, as well as feel, in such cases, I am convinced, because they understand me when I express my moral judgment, and express theirs by the same terms and phrases.

Suppose that, in a case well known to both, my friend says, *Such a man did well and worthily, his conduct is highly approvable*. This speech, according to all rules of interpretation, expresses my friend's judgment of the man's conduct. This judgment may be true or false, and I may agree in opinion with him, or I may dissent from him without offence, as we may differ in other matters of judgment.

Suppose, again, that, in relation to the same case, my friend says, *The man's conduct gave me a very agreeable feeling*.

This speech, if approbation be nothing but an agreeable feeling, must have the very same meaning with the first, and express neither more nor less. But this cannot be, for two reasons.

First, Because there is no rule in grammar or rhetoric, nor any usage in language, by which these two speeches can be construed, so as to have the same meaning. The *first* expresses plainly an opinion or judgment of the conduct of the man, but says nothing of the speaker. The *second* only testifies a fact concerning the speaker, to wit, that he had such a feeling.

Another reason why these two speeches cannot mean the same thing is, that the first may be contradicted without any ground of offence, such contradiction being only a difference of opinion, which, to a reasonable man, gives no offence. But the second speech cannot be contradicted without an affront; for, as every ‹476› man must know his own feelings, to deny that a man had a feeling which he affirms he had, is to charge him with falsehood.

If moral approbation be a real judgment, which produces an agreeable feeling in the mind of him who judges, both speeches are perfectly intelligible, in the most obvious and literal sense. Their meaning is different, but they are related, so that the one may be inferred from the other, as we infer the effect from the cause, or the cause from the effect. I know, that what a man judges to be a very worthy action, he contemplates with pleasure; and what he contemplates with pleasure must, in his judgment, have worth. But the judgment and the feeling are different acts of his mind, though connected as cause and effect. He can express either the one or the other with perfect propriety; but the speech which expresses his feeling is altogether improper and inept to express his judgment, for

this evident reason; that judgment and feeling, though in some cases connected, are things in their nature different.

If we suppose, on the other hand, that moral approbation is nothing more than an agreeable feeling, occasioned by the contemplation of an action, the second speech above mentioned has a distinct meaning, and expresses all that is meant by moral approbation. But the first speech either means the very same thing, (which cannot be, for the reasons already mentioned) or it has no meaning.

Now, we may appeal to the Reader, whether, in conversation upon human characters, such speeches as the first are not as frequent, as familiar, and as well understood, as any thing in language; and whether they have not been common in all ages that we can trace, and in all languages?

This doctrine, therefore, That moral approbation is merely a feeling without judgment, necessarily carries along with it this ‹477› consequence, that a form of speech, upon one of the most common topics of discourse, which either has no meaning, or a meaning irreconcilable to all rules of grammar or rhetoric, is found to be common and familiar in all languages and in all ages of the world, while every man knows how to express the meaning, if it have any, in plain and proper language.

Such a consequence I think sufficient to sink any philosophical opinion on which it hangs.

A particular language may have some oddity, or even absurdity, introduced by some man of eminence, from caprice or wrong judgment, and followed, by servile imitators, for a time, till it be detected, and, of consequence, discountenanced and dropt; but that the same absurdity should pervade all languages, through all ages, and that, after being detected and exposed, it should still keep its countenance and its place in language as much as before, this can never be while men have understanding.

It may be observed by the way, that the same argument may be applied, with equal force, against those other paradoxical opinions of modern philosophy, which we before mentioned as connected with this, such as, that beauty and deformity are not at all in the objects to which language universally ascribes them, but are merely feelings in the mind of the spectator; that the secondary qualities are not in external objects, but are merely feelings or sensations in him that perceives them; and, in general, that our external and internal senses are faculties by which we have sensations or feelings only, but by which we do not judge.

That every form of speech, which language affords to express our

judgments, should, in all ages, and in all languages, be used to express what is no judgment; and that feelings, which are ‹478› easily expressed in proper language, should as universally be expressed by language altogether improper and absurd, I cannot believe; and therefore must conclude, that if language be the expression of thought, men judge of the primary and secondary qualities of body by their external senses, of beauty and deformity by their taste, and of virtue and vice by their moral faculty.

A truth so evident as this is, can hardly be obscured and brought into doubt, but by the abuse of words. And much abuse of words there has been upon this subject. To avoid this, as much as possible, I have used the word *judgment*, on one side, and *sensation* or *feeling*, upon the other; because these words have been least liable to abuse or ambiguity. But it may be proper to make some observations upon other words that have been used in this controversy.

Mr HUME, in his Treatise of Human Nature, has employed two sections upon it, the titles of which are, *Moral Distinctions not derived from Reason*, and *Moral Distinctions derived from a Moral Sense*.[85]

When he is not, by custom, led unawares to speak of reason like other men, he limits that word to signify only the power of judging in matters merely speculative. Hence he concludes, 'That reason of itself is inactive and perfectly inert.' [86] That 'actions may be laudable or blameable, but cannot be reasonable or unreasonable.' [87] That 'it is not contrary to reason, to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.'[88] That 'it is not contrary to reason, for me to chuse my total ruin to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian, or of a person wholly unknown to me.'[89] That 'reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office, than to serve and obey them.'[90]

‹479› If we take the word *reason* to mean what common use, both of Philosophers, and of the vulgar, hath made it to mean, these maxims are not only false, but licentious. It is only his abuse of the words *reason* and *passion*, that can justify them from this censure.

85. *Treatise*, 3.1.1–2.
86. Reason is called 'inactive' in *Treatise*, 3.1.1.7: SBN 457 and 'perfectly inert' in *Treatise*, 3.1.1.8: SBN 458.
87. *Treatise*, 3.1.1.10: SBN 458.
88. *Treatise*, 2.3.3.6: SBN 416.
89. *Treatise*, 2.3.3.6: SBN 416.
90. *Treatise*, 2.3.3.4 : SBN 415.

The meaning of a common word is not to be ascertained by philosophical theory, but by common usage; and if a man will take the liberty of limiting or extending the meaning of common words at his pleasure, he may, like MANDEVILLE, insinuate the most licentious paradoxes with the appearance of plausibility.[91] I have before made some observations upon the meaning of this word, Essay II. chap. 2. and Essay III. part 3. chap. 1. to which the Reader is referred.

When Mr HUME derives moral distinctions from a moral sense, I agree with him in words, but we differ about the meaning of the word *sense*. Every power to which the name of a sense has been given, is a power of judging of the objects of that sense, and has been accounted such in all ages; the moral sense therefore is the power of judging in morals. But Mr HUME will have the moral sense to be only a power of feeling, without judging: This I take to be an abuse of a word.

Authors who place moral approbation in feeling only, very often use the word *sentiment*, to express feeling without judgment. This I take likewise to be an abuse of a word. Our moral determinations may, with propriety, be called *moral sentiments*. For the word *sentiment*, in the English language, never, as I conceive, signifies mere feeling, but judgment accompanied with feeling. It was wont to signify opinion or judgment of any kind, but, of late, is appropriated to signify an opinion or judgment, that strikes, and produces some agreeable or uneasy emotion. So we speak of sentiments of respect, of esteem, of gratitude. But I never heard the pain of the gout, or any other mere feeling, called a sentiment.

‹480› Even the word *judgment* has been used by Mr HUME to express what he maintains to be only a feeling. Treatise of Human Nature, part 3. page 3. ‘The term *perception* is no less applicable to those *judgments* by which we distinguish moral good and evil, than to every other operation of the mind.’[92] Perhaps he used this word inadvertently; for I think there cannot be a greater abuse of words, than to put judgment for what he held to be mere feeling.

All the words most commonly used, both by Philosophers and by the vulgar, to express the operations of our moral faculty, such as, *decision, determination, sentence, approbation, disapprobation, applause, censure, praise, blame*, necessarily imply judgment in their

91. Bernard Mandeville’s ideas in *The Fable of the Bees* about the public benefit of vice and the detrimental effects of virtue were often rejected as based upon a paradoxical or perverse use of the terms.

92. *Treatise*, 3.1.1.2: SBN 456.

meaning. When, therefore, they are used by Mr HUME, and others who hold his opinion, to signify feelings only, this is an abuse of words. If these Philosophers wish to speak plainly and properly, they must, in discoursing of morals, discard these words altogether, because their established signification in the language, is contrary to what they would express by them.

They must likewise discard from morals the words *ought* and *ought not*, which very properly express judgment, but cannot be applied to mere feelings. Upon these words Mr HUME has made a particular observation in the conclusion of his first section above mentioned. I shall give it in his own words, and make some remarks upon it.

'I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings, an observation which may, perhaps, be found of some importance. In every system of morality which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the Author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a GOD, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when, of a sudden, I am surprised to find, that, instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. ‹481› This change is imperceptible, but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought* or *ought not* expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it should be observed and explained; and, at the same time, that a reason should be given for what seems altogether inconceivable; how this new relation can be a deduction from others which are entirely different from it. But as Authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the Readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue, is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason.'[93]

We may here observe, that it is acknowledged, that the words *ought* and *ought not* express some relation or affirmation; but a relation or affirmation which Mr HUME thought inexplicable, or, at least, inconsistent with his system of morals. He must, therefore, have thought, that they ought not to be used in treating of that subject.

He likewise makes two demands, and, taking it for granted that they cannot be satisfied, is persuaded, that an attention to this is sufficient to subvert all the vulgar systems of morals.

93. *Treatise*, 3.1.1.27: SBN 469–70.

The *first* demand is, that *ought* and *ought not* be explained.

To a man that understands English, there are surely no words that require explanation less. Are not all men taught, from their early years, that they ought not to lie, nor steal, nor swear falsely? But Mr HUME thinks, that men never understood what these precepts mean, or rather that they are unintelligible. If this be so, I think indeed it will follow, that all the vulgar systems of morals are subverted.

‹482› Dr JOHNSON, in his Dictionary, explains the word *ought* to signify, being obliged by duty; and I know no better explication that can be given of it.[94] The Reader will see what I thought necessary to say concerning the moral relation expressed by this word, in Essay III. part 3. chap. 5.

The *second* demand is, That a reason should be given why this relation should be a deduction from others which are entirely different from it.

This is to demand a reason for what does not exist. The first principles of morals are not deductions. They are self-evident; and their truth, like that of other axioms, is perceived without reasoning or deduction. And moral truths that are not self-evident, are deduced, not from relations quite different from them, but from the first principles of morals.

In a matter so interesting to mankind, and so frequently the subject of conversation among the learned and the unlearned as morals is, it may surely be expected, that men will express both their judgments and their feelings with propriety, and consistently with the rules of language. An opinion, therefore, which makes the language of all ages and nations, upon this subject, to be improper, contrary to all rules of language, and fit to be discarded, needs no other refutation.

As mankind have, in all ages, understood *reason* to mean the power by which not only our speculative opinions, but our actions ought to be regulated, we may say, with perfect propriety, that all vice is contrary to reason; that, by reason, we are to judge of what we ought to do, as well as of what we ought to believe.

But though all vice be contrary to reason, I conceive that it ‹483› would not be a proper definition of vice to say, that it is a conduct contrary to reason, because this definition would apply equally to folly, which all men distinguish from vice.

There are other phrases which have been used on the same side of the question, which I see no reason for adopting, such as, *acting contrary to*

94. Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. ‘ought’.

the relations of things, contrary *to the reason of things, to the fitness of things, to the truth of things, to absolute fitness*.[95] These phrases have not the authority of common use, which, in matters of language, is great. They seem to have been invented by some authors, with a view to explain the nature of vice; but I do not think they answer that end. If intended as definitions of vice, they are improper; because, in the most favourable sense they can bear, they extend to every kind of foolish and absurd conduct, as well as to that which is vicious.

I shall conclude this chapter with some observations upon the five arguments which Mr HUME has offered upon this point in his Enquiry.

The *first* is, That it is impossible that the hypothesis he opposes, can, in any particular instance, be so much as rendered intelligible, whatever specious figure it may make in general discourse. 'Examine,' says he, 'the crime of *ingratitude*, anatomize all its circumstances, and examine, by your reason alone, in what consists the demerit or blame, you will never come to any issue or conclusion.'[96]

I think it unnecessary to follow him through all the accounts of ingratitude which he conceives may be given by those whom he opposes, because I agree with him in that which he himself adopts, to wit, 'That this crime arises from a complication of circumstances, which, being presented to the spectator, excites ‹484› the sentiment of blame by the particular structure and fabric of his mind.'[97]

This he thought a true and intelligible account of the criminality of ingratitude. So do I. And therefore I think the hypothesis he opposes is intelligible, when applied to a particular instance.

Mr HUME, no doubt, thought, that the account he gives of ingratitude is inconsistent with the hypothesis he opposes, and could not be adopted by those who hold that hypothesis. He could be led to think so, only by taking for granted one of these two things. Either *first*, That the *sentiment*

95. These expressions are a shared vocabulary for a group of thinkers whom Reid considered together in various places; they included John Balguy, Samuel Clarke, Richard Hooker, Richard Price and William Wollaston; see 4/I/21, 1; 7/V/1, 27; for criticism along the same lines as here, see 8/III/10; cf. Essay III, Part 3, Chap. 6 at note 96, p. 237. For key examples of the usage Reid discusses, see Samuel Clarke, *Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Religion*, passim, but see Proposition 1, pp. 5–6, and Proof I, pp. 45ff.; [John Balguy], *Foun dation of Moral Goodness*, pp. 31–2, 35ff, 57 and 60.
96. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1.5: SBN 287.
97. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1.6: SBN 287–8.

of blame is a feeling only, without judgment; or,*secondly*, That whatever is excited by the particular fabric and structure of the mind must be feeling only, and not judgment. But I cannot grant either the one or the other.

For, as to the *first*, it seems evident to me, that both *sentiment* and *blame* imply judgment; and, therefore, that the *sentiment of blame* is a judgment accompanied with feeling, and not mere feeling without judgment.

The *second* can as little be granted; for no operation of mind, whether judgment or feeling, can be excited but by that particular structure and fabric of the mind which makes us capable of that operation.

By that part of our fabric which we call*the faculty of seeing*, we judge of visible objects; by *taste*, another part of our fabric, we judge of beauty and deformity; by that part of our fabric, which enables us to form abstract conceptions, to compare them, and perceive their relations, we judge of abstract truths; and by that part of our fabric which we call the *moral faculty*, we ‹485› judge of virtue and vice. If we suppose a being without any moral faculty in his fabric, I grant that he could not have the sentiments of blame and moral approbation.

There are, therefore, judgments, as well as feelings, that are excited by the particular structure and fabric of the mind. But there is this remarkable difference between them, That every judgment is, in its own nature, true or false; and though it depends upon the fabric of a mind, whether it have such a judgment or not, it depends not upon that fabric whether the judgment be true or not. A true judgment will be true, whatever be the fabric of the mind; but a particular structure and fabric is necessary, in order to our perceiving that truth. Nothing like this can be said of mere feelings, because the attributes of true or false do not belong to them.

Thus I think it appears, that the hypothesis which Mr HUME opposes is not unintelligible, when applied to the particular instances of ingratitude; because the account of ingratitude which he himself thinks true and intelligible, is perfectly agreeable to it.

The *second* argument amounts to this: That in moral deliberation, we must be acquainted before-hand with all the objects and all their relations. After these things are known, the understanding has no farther room to operate. Nothing remains but to feel, on our part, some sentiment of blame or approbation.[98]

98. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1.11: SBN 290.

Let us apply this reasoning to the office of a judge. In a cause that comes before him, he must be made acquainted with all the objects, and all their relations. After this, his understanding has no farther room to operate. Nothing remains, on his part, ‹486› but to feel the right or the wrong; and mankind have, very absurdly, called him a *judge*; he ought to be called a *feeler*.

To answer this argument more directly: The man who deliberates, after all the objects and relations mentioned by Mr HUME are known to him, has a point to determine; and that is, whether the action under his deliberation ought to be done or ought not. In most cases, this point will appear self-evident to a man who has been accustomed to exercise his moral judgment; in some cases it may require reasoning.

In like manner, the judge, after all the circumstances of the cause are known, has to judge, whether the plaintiff has a just plea or not.

The *third* argument is taken from the analogy between moral beauty and natural, between moral sentiment and taste. As beauty is not a quality of the object, but a certain feeling of the spectator, so virtue and vice are not qualities in the persons to whom language ascribes them, but feelings of the spectator.[99]

But is it certain that beauty is not any quality of the object? This is indeed a paradox of modern philosophy, built upon a philosophical theory; but a paradox so contrary to the common language and common sense of mankind, that it ought rather to overturn the theory on which it stands, than receive any support from it. And if beauty be really a quality of the object, and not merely a feeling of the spectator, the whole force of this argument goes over to the other side of the question.

'EUCLID,' he says, 'has fully explained all the qualities of the circle, but has not, in any proposition, said a word of its beauty. The reason is evident. The beauty is not a quality of the circle.'[100]

‹487› By the *qualities of the circle*, he must mean its properties; and there are here two mistakes.

First, EUCLID has not fully explained all the properties of the circle. Many have been discovered and demonstrated which he never dreamt of.

Secondly, The reason why EUCLID has not said a word of the beauty of the circle, is not, *that beauty is not a quality of the circle*; the reason is, that EUCLID never digresses from his subject. His purpose was to demon-

99. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1.13: SBN 291.
100. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1.14: SBN 291.

strate the mathematical properties of the circle. Beauty is a quality of the circle, not demonstrable by mathematical reasoning, but immediately perceived by a good taste. To speak of it would have been a digression from his subject; and that is a fault he is never guilty of.

The *fourth* argument is, That inanimate objects may bear to each other all the same relations which we observe in moral agents.[101]

If this were true, it would be very much to the purpose; but it seems to be thrown out rashly, without any attention to its evidence. Had Mr HUME reflected but a very little upon this dogmatical assertion, a thousand instances would have occurred to him in direct contradiction to it.

May not one animal be more tame, or more docile, or more cunning, or more fierce, or more ravenous, than another? Are these relations to be found in inanimate objects? May not one man be a better painter, or sculptor, or ship-builder, or tailor, or shoemaker, than another? Are these relations to be found in inanimate objects, or even in brute-animals? May not one moral agent be more just, more pious, more attentive to any moral duty, or more eminent in any moral virtue, than another? Are ‹488› not these relations peculiar to moral agents? But to come to the relations most essential to morality.

When I say that *I ought to do such an action*, that *it is my duty*, do not these words express a relation between me and a certain action in my power; a relation which cannot be between inanimate objects, or between any other objects but a moral agent and his moral actions; a relation which is well understood by all men come to years of understanding, and expressed in all languages?

Again, when in deliberating about two actions in my power, which cannot both be done, I say *this* ought to be preferred to the other; that justice, for instance, ought to be preferred to generosity; I express a moral relation between two actions of a moral agent, which is well understood, and which cannot exist between objects of any other kind.

There are, therefore, moral relations which can have no existence but between moral agents and their voluntary actions. To determine these relations is the object of morals; and to determine relations is the province of judgment, and not of mere feeling.

The *last* argument is a chain of several propositions, which deserve distinct consideration. They may, I think, be summed up in these four:
1. There must be ultimate ends of action, beyond which it is absurd to ask

101. *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1.17: SBN 293.

a reason of acting. 2. The ultimate ends of human actions can never be accounted for by reason; 3. but recommend themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of mankind, without any dependence on the intellectual faculties. 4. As virtue is an end, and is desirable on its own account, without fee or reward, merely for the immediate satisfaction it conveys; it is requisite, that there should be some senti‹489›ment which it touches, some internal taste or feeling, or whatever you please to call it, which distinguishes moral good and evil, and which embraces the one and rejects the other.[102]

To the *first* of these propositions I entirely agree. The ultimate ends of action are what I have called *the principles of action*, which I have endeavoured, in the third Essay, to enumerate, and to class under three heads of mechanical, animal and rational.

The *second* proposition needs some explication. I take its meaning to be, That there cannot be another end, for the sake of which an ultimate end is pursued: For the reason of an action means nothing but the end for which the action is done; and the reason of an end of action can mean nothing but another end, for the sake of which that end is pursued, and to which it is the means.

That this is the author's meaning is evident from his reasoning in confirmation of it. 'Ask a man, *why he uses exercise?* he will answer, *because he desires to keep his health*. If you then enquire, *why he desires health*? he will readily reply, *because sickness is painful*. If you push your enquiries further, and desire a reason why he hates pain, it is impossible he can ever give any. This is an ultimate end, and is never referred to any other object.' To account by reason for an end, therefore, is to show another end, for the sake of which that end is desired and pursued. And that, in this sense, an ultimate end can never be accounted for by reason, is certain, because that cannot be an ultimate end which is pursued only for the sake of another end.

I agree therefore with Mr HUME in this second proposition, which indeed is implied in the first.

‹490› The *third* proposition is, That ultimate ends recommend themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of mankind, without any dependence on the intellectual faculties.

By *sentiments* he must here mean feelings without judgment, and by

102. See, for the passages quoted and alluded to in this and the following paragraphs, *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1.18–20: SBN 293–4.

affections, such affections as imply no judgment. For surely any operation that implies judgment, cannot be independent of the intellectual faculties.

This being understood, I cannot assent to this proposition.

The Author seems to think it implied in the preceding, or a necessary consequence from it, that because an ultimate end cannot be accounted for by reason; that is, cannot be pursued merely for the sake of another end; therefore it can have no dependence on the intellectual faculties. I deny this consequence, and can see no force in it.

I think it not only does not follow from the preceding proposition, but that it is contrary to truth.

A man may act from gratitude as an ultimate end; but gratitude implies a judgment and belief of favours received, and therefore is dependent on the intellectual faculties. A man may act from respect to a worthy character as an ultimate end; but this respect necessarily implies a judgment of worth in the person, and therefore is dependent on the intellectualfaculties.

I have endeavoured in the third Essay before mentioned, to shew that, beside the animal principles of our nature, which require will and intention, but not judgment, there are also in human nature rational principles of action, or ultimate ends, which have, in all ages, been called rational, and have a just ‹491› title to that name, not only from the authority of language, but because they can have no existence but in beings endowed with reason, and because, in all their exertions, they require not only intention and will, but judgment or reason.

Therefore, until it can be proved that an ultimate end cannot be dependent on the intellectual faculties, this third proposition, and all that hangs upon it, must fall to the ground.

The *last* proposition assumes, with very good reason, That virtue is an ultimate end, and desirable on its own account. From which, if the third proposition were true, the conclusion would undoubtedly follow, That virtue has no dependence on the intellectual faculties. But as that proposition is not granted, nor proved, this conclusion is left without any support from the whole of the argument.

I should not have thought it worth while to insist so long upon this controversy, if I did not conceive that the consequences which the contrary opinions draw after them are important.

If what we call *moral judgment* be no real judgment, but merely a feeling, it follows, that the principles of morals which we have been

taught to consider as an immutable law to all intelligent beings, have no other foundation but an arbitrary structure and fabric in the constitution of the human mind: So that, by a change in our structure, what is immoral might become moral, virtue might be turned into vice, and vice into virtue. And beings of a different structure, according to the variety of their feelings, may have different, nay opposite, measures of moral good and evil.

It follows that, from our notions of morals, we can conclude ‹492› nothing concerning a moral character in the Deity, which is the foun - dation of all religion, and the strongest support of virtue.

Nay, this opinion seems to conclude strongly against a moral character in the Deity, since nothing arbitrary or mutable can be conceived to enter into the description of a nature eternal, immutable, and necessarily existent. Mr HUME seems perfectly consistent with himself, in allowing of no evidence for the moral attributes of the Supreme Being, whatever there may be for his natural attributes.

On the other hand, if moral judgment be a true and real judgment, the principles of morals stand upon the immutable foundation of truth, and can undergo no change by any difference of fabric, or structure of those who judge of them. There may be, and there are, beings, who have not the faculty of conceiving moral truths, or perceiving the excellence of moral worth, as there are beings incapable of perceiving mathematical truths; but no defect, no error of understanding, can make what is true to be false.

If it be true that piety, justice, benevolence, wisdom, temperance, fortitude, are in their own nature the most excellent and most amiable qualities of a human creature; that vice has an inherent turpitude, which merits disapprobation and dislike; these truths cannot be hid from him whose understanding is infinite, whose judgment is always according to truth, and who must esteem every thing according to its real value.

The Judge of all the earth, we are sure, will do right. He has given to men the faculty of perceiving the right and the wrong in conduct, as far as is necessary to our present state, and of perceiving the dignity of the one, and the demerit of the ‹493› other; and surely there can be no real knowledge or real excellence in man, which is not in his Maker.

We may therefore justly conclude, That what we know in part, and see in part, of right and wrong, he sees perfectly; that the moral excellence which we see and admire in some of our fellow-creatures, is a faint

but true copy of that moral excellence, which is essential to his nature; and that to tread the path of virtue, is the true dignity of our nature, an imitation of GOD, and the way to obtain his favour.

FINIS

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INDEX OF NAMES

Abradatas of Susa, 57*n*
Accius, Lucius
  Atreus, 109*n*
Aesop
  Fables, 125*n*, 126*n*, 206
Agrippa, Menenius, 272*n*
Alexander the Great, 103, 242
Allan, David
  Making British Culture, xxii*n*
Anaximander, 340*n*
Archimedes, 61, 245
Aristides, 324–5*n*
Aristotle/Aristotelians, 8, 35–6, 77, 89, 134, 254, 283*n*, 290, 324
  De Interpretatione, 254
  Metaphysics, 89*n*
  Poetics, 84 & *n*
  Sophistici Elenchi, 86*n*
Atreus, 109
Augustine, 259
  City of God, 259*n*

Bacon, Francis
  Advancement of Learning, 86*n*
Balguy, John, 159*n*, 175*n*, 278*n*
  Foundation of Moral Goodness, 356*n*
Bayle, Pierre, 268*n*
  Réponse aux questions d'un provincial, 253*n*
Beattie, James
  Elements of Moral Science, xx–xxi
  Essay on Truth, 257*n*
Bell, John, xvii–xviii
Belsham, William, xx
Berkeley, George, 232*n*, 345
Blackstone, William
  Commentaries on the Laws of England, 72*n*
Boscovich, Roger
  Theoria philosophiae naturalis, 267*n*
Bradfute, John, xviii
Broadie, Sarah, viii
Brookes, Derek, vii
Brown, William Laurence
  Essay on the Folly of Scepticism, xiv*n*
  Essay on the Natural Equality of Man, xiv*n*
Browne, Simon
  Defence of the Religion of Nature and the Christian Revelation, 145–6
Brucker, Johann Jakob
  Historia philosophica doctrinae de ideis, 35*n*, 139*n*
Burnet, James *see* Monboddo
Butler, Joseph, ix, 56*n*, 175*n*, 292*n*
  Analogy of Religion, 269 & *n*, 291*n*
  Fifteen Sermons, 127–8 & *n*, 166*n*, 191*n*, 194*n*, 291*n*
Butler, Samuel
  Hudibras, 14–15*n*

Cæsar, Julius, 242
Cairns, John, viii
Caligula, 109*n*
Campbell, Archibald, 159*n*
  Enquiry into the Original of Moral Virtue, 303*n*
Carmichael, Gershom
  Natural Rights, 299*n*, 329*n*
  Synopsis of Natural Theology, 261*n*
Caroline, Queen of England, 146
Cato Uticensis, Marcus Porcius, 198
Cicero, ix, 136, 205, 287, 302–3, 314*n*, 338
  De fato, 205 & *n*
  De finibus, 101 & *n*, 118, 134*n*, 159*n*, 262*n*, 291*n*, 302–3*nn*, 316*n*, 338*n*
  De legibus, 287*n*
  De officiis, 56, 58, 155–6 & *n*, 171 & *n*, 172 & *nn*, 272*n*, 287*n*, 298 & *n*, 303*n*, 324*n*
  De senectute, 109 & *n*
  Pro Sextio, 315
  Tusculanae disputationes, 67*n*, 133 & *n*
Clarke, John, of Hull, 159*n*

Clarke, Samuel, ix*n*, 159*n*, 175*n*, 213*n*, 215, 252
Demonstration of Being and Attributes of God, 215*n*, 243 & *n*, 252*n*
Obligations of Natural Religion, 356*n*
'Of the Omniscience of God', 253*n*
Papers passed between Leibniz and Clarke, 196*n*, 244*n*
Remarks upon [Collins'] Philosophical Enquiry, 196*n*, 243 & *n*
Cleanthes, 262
Collier, Arthur, 345
Collins, Anthony, 196*n*, 214*n*
Philosophical Inquiry conc. Human Liberty, 199*n*, 213*n*, 248*n*, 252*n*, 254*n*, 260*n*
Cousin, Victor, xxi
Crombie, Alexander, xx
Cumberland, Richard, 272*n*
Currie, James, xix
Currie, William Wallace
Memoir of the Life, Writings and Correspondence of James Currie, xix*n*
Cyrus, 57

Descartes, René; Cartesian thought, xxi*n*, 20, 35, 36–7, 210, 242, 345, 348
Diodorus Siculus
Bibliotheca Historica, 103*n*
Diogenes Laertius, 159*n*
Lives of Eminent Philosophers, 160*n*, 185*n*
Donne, John
Poems, 264*n*
Duncan, William James, xiii*n*
Notices and Documents Illustrative of the Literary History of Glasgow, xiii*n*

Edwards, Jonathan, xii, 214*n*
Freedom of Will, 47*n*, 196*n*, 199*n*, 224*n*, 248*n*, 252*n*, 254*n*, 260*n*
Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of Freedom of Will, xii
Empedocles, 35*n*
Epicurus, 101, 159*n*, 160, 185, 303, 338 & *n*
Euclid, 8, 22, 39, 63, 68, 349, 358–9

Fieser, James, ed.
Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, xix*n*, xx*n*
Fordyce, David
Elements of Moral Philosophy, 299*n*

Garcilaso de la Vega
Comentarios reales del Perú, 272*n*
Gassendi, Pierre, 159*n*, 272*n*
Gay, John, 175*n*
'Dissertation conc. Principle and Criterion of Virtue', 99*n*
Godwin, William, xx
Grandi, Giovanni, viii
Gregory, James, xi*n*, xvi–xvii, xix, 258*n*
'Essay on Motive and Action, Cause and Effect', xi*n*, 33*n*, 38*n*, 46*n*, 59–60*n*, 202*n*
Philosophical and Literary Essays, xx
Greville, Fulke
Mustapha, 252*n*
Grotius, Hugo
De iure belli ac pacis, 285*n*, 287–8 & *n*, 289*n*, 313*n*, 316*n*

Haakonssen, Knud
'Natural Jurisprudence and the Identity of the Scottish Enlightenment', xv*n*
Haldane, John, viii
Haldane, John & Read, S., eds.
Philosophy of Thomas Reid, 7*n*
Halliwell, Stephen, viii
Hamilton, William, xix
Harrington, James, 282*n*
Harris, James A.
Of Liberty and Necessity, xx*n*
Hartley, David, 99*n*, 175*n*, 214*n*
Observations on Man, 47*n*, 262*n*, 345*n*
Henri IV of France, 72*n*
Hobbes, Thomas, 47*n*, 199, 314*n*, 315, 322, 325, 334
De cive, 272*n*
Elements of Law, 124*n*
Leviathan, 54*n*, 199*n*, 315*n*
Of Liberty and Necessity, 199*n*, 248*n*, 254*n*
Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance, 199*n*
Home, Henry *see* Kames

Hooker, Richard, 175*n*, 356*n*
Horace
De arte poetica, 39*n*
Epistles, 162 & *n*, 234*n*
Odes, 151 & *n*
Hume, David, xi, xii, xv, 20–7, 87–8, 136, 205, 212–13 & *n*, 214*n*, 232*n*, 249–50, 268*n*, 283*n*, 289, 292*n*, 294–5, 299, 301–28, 336–44, 345, 347, 352–62
Enquiry conc. Human Understanding, 9*n*, 213*n*, 260*n*
Enquiry conc. Principles of Morals, 171 & *n*, 294*n*, 301 & *n*, 303*n*, 307–8 & *n*, 312 & *n*, 315*n*, 319–27 & *nn*, 328 & *n*, 340–1 & *n*, 344*n*, 356, 356–60*nn*
Essays and Treatises, 301 & *n*
Letters, 291*n*
Treatise of Human Nature, 8–9 & *n*, 18–19*nn*, 23–5*nn*, 54*n*, 71*n*, 88*n*, 135 & *n*, 136, 153 & *n*, 157 & *n*, 177*n*, 205*n*, 213*n*, 228*n*, 248*n*, 249*n*, 294–5 & *nn*, 299*n*, 301 & *n*, 303*n*, 304*n*, 308, 325*n*, 328 & *n*, 337 & *n*, 338*n*, 345*n*, 347 & *n*, 352–3 & *nn*
Hutcheson, Francis, ix, 159*n*, 175 & *n*, 272*n*, 278*n*, 291*n*, 300*n*
Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, 54*n*, 135 & *n*, 139 & *n*, 143*n*
Illustrations upon the Moral Sense, 294*n*
Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue, 56*n*, 289*n*, 345*n*
Philosophiae moralis institutio/Short Introduction, 46*n*, 56*n*, 135 & *n*, 139 & *n*, 284*n*, 286*n*, 289*n*, 299*n*, 313*n*, 329*n*
Synopsis of Metaphysics, 261*n*
System of Moral Philosophy, 47*n*, 237*n*, 286*n*, 289*n*, 299*n*, 313*n*

Iliffe, Rob, viii
Isocrates
Nicocles, 272*n*

Job, 144, 181

Johnson, Samuel
Dictionary of the English Language, 355 & *n*
Justinian
Digest, 67*n*, 284*n*, 329*n*
Institutes, 67*n*, 284*n*
Juvenal
Satires, 161–2 & *n*, 164 & *n*, 272*n*

Kames, Henry Home, Lord, xii, xvi, 47*n*, 213*n*, 214*n*, 339*n*
Elements of Criticism, 128 & *n*, 136*n*
Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion, xii, 228*n*, 248*n*, 252*n*, 260*n*
King, William, ix*n*
Essay on the Origin of Evil, 99*n*

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, ix*n*, 36, 199*n*, 210
Papers passed between Leibniz and Clarke, 196*n*, 244*n*, 245*n*, 252*n*
Principes de la nature et de la grâce, 244*n*
Recueil de diverses pièces, 244*n*
Système nouveau, 244*n*
Livy, 272*n*
Lobban, Michael, viii
Locke, John, 20–6, 205n, 345, 348
Essay concerning Human Understanding, 9*n*, 10*n*, 20, 29, 47–8, 131 & *n*, 199*n*
Long, Alex, viii
Lucretius, 159*n*

Machiavelli, Niccolò, 282*n*
Maclaurin, Colin, 81
'Of the Bases of the Cells … Bees', 81*n*
Malebranche, Nicholas, 41
Mandeville, Bernard, 283*n*, 353
Fable of the Bees, 353*n*
Martini, Martino
Sinicæ historiæ, Decas I, 272*n*
Millar, John, 339*n*
Milton, John
Paradise Lost, 133*n*, 137 & *n*
Molina, Luis de, 260*n*
Monboddo, James Burnet, Lord
Origin and Progress of Language, 340*n*

More, Henry
Account of Virtue, 254*n*
Enchiridion Ethicum, 253–4*n*
Moreau, Pierre
L'Oeuvre de James Beattie, xxi*n*
Morgan, Cæsar
Demonstration that True Philosophy has no Tendency to undermine Divine Revelation, xiv*n*

Newton, Isaac
Four Letters … to Doctor Bentley, 61*n*
Opticks, 23, 37
Principia/Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy, 34, 61, 211*n*, 247
Norton, David Fate *see* Stewart-Robertson, J. C.
Numicius, 162

Ovid, 113
Metamorphoses, 65n, 158 & *n*

Panætius, 155, 172
Pantheia, 57n
Paul, Apostle, 296
Persius
Satires, 272*n*
Plato, 35, 139, 332
Alcibiades, 161
Meno, 189 & *n*, 332*n*
The Republic, 58 & *n*, 172 & *n*, 315
Plutarch
Lives, 61*n*, 324*n*
Symposium, 340*n*
Pope, Alexander
'Epistle to Miss Blount', 143 & *n*
Epistles to Several Persons, 69
Essay on Man, 119
Price, Richard, xii, xviii*n*, 159*n*, 278*n*, 292*n*, 356*n*
A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity, xii
Review of Morals, 156 & *n*, 175*n*, 291*n*
Priestley, Joseph, xi–xii, xix–xx, xxi, 99*n*, 205, 213*n*, 214*n*, 255–7
Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit, xii, 267*n*
Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity, 47*n*, 199*n*, 200*n*, 205 & *n*, 213*n*, 231 & *n*, 248*n*, 249*n*, 251*n*, 252*n*, 254*n*, 256*n*, 257*nn*, 260*n*, 262*nn*, 267*n*
The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated, xii
Examination of Reid, Beattie and Oswald, xx, 232*n*
Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity, xii, 204 & *n*
Pufendorf, Samuel von, 272*n*
De officio hominis et civis, 329*n*
Duty of Man, 237*n*
Law of Nature, 237*n*, 289*n*, 313*n*, 316*n*

Ravaillac, François, 72
Raynal, Guillaume, abbé, 206–7
Philosophical and Political History, 206*n*
Read, S. *see* Haldane
Reid, Thomas
'Of active power', 7*n*
Correspondence, xi*n*, xvi–xx*nn*, 27*n*, 33*n*, 38*n*, 46*n*, 47*n*, 59–60*n*, 202*n*, 258*n*
Essays on the Active Powers of Man, vii, ix–xxv, 5*n*, 103*n*, 110*n*, 136*n*, 199*n*
Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man, vii, xvi–xviii, xxi, xxii, 26, 88*n*, 139*n*, 176*n*, 178*n*, 270, 282*n*, 330*n*, 345 & *nn*
Essays on the Powers of the Human Mind, xviii, xxiii
Inquiry into the Human Mind, xxi*n*, xxii, 141*n*, 176*n*
Logic, Rhetoric and Fine Arts, x*n*, 330*n*, 340*n*
'Minutes of a Philosophical Club', ix*n*, 143*n*
'Observations on … Volition', 46*n*
Philosophical Orations of Thomas Reid, ix*n*
'On Power', 7*n*
Practical Ethics, ix*n*, 71*n*, 130*n*, 149*n*, 274*n*, 282*nn*, 284*n*, 285*n*, 286*n*, 313*n*, 315*n*, 319*n*, 327*n*, 330*n*
Reid on the Animate Creation, xii*n*, 267*n*

Reid on Society and Politics, 149*n*, 282*n*
Reid and the University, ix*n*
'Scheme of a Course of Philosophy', ix*n*
'Thoughts on the Utopian System', 149*n*
Works of Thomas Reid, xix
Robinson, George, xvii–xviii
Robinson, John, xviii
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques
Discours sur … l'inégalité parmi les hommes, 340*n*

Seneca
De beneficiis, 316*n*
Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd earl of, 56*n*, 175 & *n*
Characteristics, 158*n*, 194 & *n*
Sensus Communis, 109 & *n*
Sher, Richard B.
The Enlightenment and the Book, xviii*n*
Sims, Robert Courthope
An Essay on the Nature and Constitution of Man, xiv*n*
Simson, John
Case of John Simson, 260–1*n*
Smith, Adam, 283*n*, 339*n*
Lectures on Jurisprudence, 289*n*, 313*n*
Theory of Moral Sentiments, 104*n*, 121 & *n*, 289*n*, 292*n*
Socrates, 67, 113, 161, ix
Söderman, Åsa, viii
Spinoza, Benedictus de, 47*n*, 212, 252
Squilante, Martino, viii
Stewart, Dugald, xvii, xxi, 95*n*, 101*n*, 135*n*, 199
'Life and Writings of Thomas Reid', xviii
Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man, xxi
Stewart, M. A., vii
Stewart-Robertson, J. C. & Norton, David Fate
'Thomas Reid on Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments', 104*n*, 121*n*
Suárez, Francisco, 260*n*
Sully, Maximilien de Béthune, Duc de
Memoirs, 72*n*

Teyler, Pieter, xiii–xiv
Themistocles, 324
Tindal, Matthew
Christianity as Old as the Creation, 146
Titius, Gottlieb Gerhard, 328–9 & *n*
Torquatus, 118
Towsey, Mark
'All partners may be enlightened …', xxii*n*
'An infant to truth engage …', xxii*n*
Turnbull, George, ix

Ulman, H. L.
Minutes of the Aberdeen Philosophical Society, ix–x*n*, 289*n*
Ulpian, 67*n*, 328–9

Velleius Paterculus, Gaius
Historiae Romanae, 198*n*
Virgil
Georgics, 15*n*, 80 & *n*, 209*n*

Webster, James, 260–1*n*
Wollaston, William, 159*n*, 175*n*, 356*n*
Wood, Paul B., vii, xii*n*
The Aberdeen Enlightenment, ix*n*

Xenophon
Cyropaedia, 57*n*
Oeconomicks, 113*n*

GENERAL INDEX

Aberdeen Philosophical Society, ix, xii, xv, 59*n*, 289*n*, 290*n*, 301*n*, 328*n*, 344*n*
Aberdeen University Library, viii, xiii, xxiii–xxv, xxvi
Aberdeen, University of, vii–viii
  Reid's teaching at, ix–x
accountability
  and active power, 236–40
  and liberty, 236–40
  and understanding, 236–7
action
  animal principles of, xi, 55–6, 78, 92–151, 156, 193, 360, 361
  deliberate, 215–16
  meaning of word, 203
  mechanical principles of, xi, 74–91, 97, 106, 360
  and motive, 291–9
  principle(s) of, xi, xxi, 51, 52, 74–8, 135, 137, 192, 273–4, 300, 360
  principles of compared, 152
  rational principles of, xi, 78, 139, 152–5, 360, 361
  selfish principles of, 95, 101–2, 107
  social principles of, 95, 102, 105, 107
  two ends of, 154
  and will, 48–50, 74
  without motive, 215–16
  see also liberty
action/agent
  goodness of, 296–9
active/passive, 13–20, 33–4
Adventurer, *The*, 146
affection(s), 48, 52–3, 58, 62, 63–4, 65, 67, 68, 69, 72, 77
  acquired, 120
  animal, 304, 306
  benevolent, 106–23
  and feeling, 108
  malevolent, 107–8, 110, 124–33
  natural, 67, 111, 301, 304, 305–6
  parental/filial, 108, 111–14, 118, 122
  and passions, 107–8
  rational, 114
  and will, 46
agent/agency, 14, 16, 28, 30, 31, 34, 38, 55, 106, 169, 173–4, 177, 196–269, 273, 291, 295–8, 310, 313, 359
  meaning of word, 203
  moral, 53, 359
  see also action
agreeableness
  as moral principle, 278n, 299, 300, 302–5
agriculture, 71n, 147, 339*n*
ambition, 18, 69, 102, 103, 104, 125, 150
Analytical Review, *The*, xix–xx
anger, 107, 116, 127–9, 132, 135, 190, 191, 332
  and madness, 234
animal principle(s) *see* action, animal principles of
animal(s), brutes, 15, 42, 43, 44, 65, 76, 78, 103, 106, 110, 111, 122, 145, 149, 168, 314
  amoral, 5–6, 190, 300, 304–6, 309
  and appetites, 92, 94, 95, 97, 98
  and conscience, 189–90
  and desires, 99, 100,
  and emulation, 124, 127
  and esteem, 99, 117
  faculties of, 52, 53, 190, 301, 304, 306, 317–18
  and feeling, 346
  goods of, 154–5
  government of, 53, 225
  and gratitude, 115
  and idea of cause, 209
  and instincts, 79–80, 85–6, 122
  and liberty, 197
  and motives, 218–19
  nature of, 273
  and obligation, 237
  and opinion, 147–8
  parental affection of, 111–12, 122

and reason, 152
and resentment, 128–30
and sociability, 333
appetite(s), 5–6, 46, 48, 52–4, 55, 56*n*, 57, 58, 59, 63–5, 77, 92–98, 122, 138, 150, 172*n*, 173, 190, 192–3, 197, 218, 280, 326–7
and reason, 93
and will, 46
approbation/disapprobation, 97, 180–6, 197, 227, 271, 290–302, 344–63
arithmetic, language of, 208
Arminianism, 260*n*
army vs militia, 149
art(s), 89, 97
and passion, 141
associationists, xv, 175*n*
Assyria, 103*n*
astronomy, 178
Ptolemaic system, 208
atheism/-ist, 194, 268
and philosophy, 208
Athens, 324
atom, 146, 242
attention, 60–3, 69, 70, 72, 76, 78, 84, 141
axioms
of Euclid, 63
mathematical, 69, 293
moral, 63

beauty, 345, 351–2, 357–9
and affection, 122–3
bees, 79, 80–2
belief, 85–8
and feeling/sensation, 348–9
Hume on, 8
benevolence, 67, 77, 95, 102, 139, 164, 178, 183, 195, 293–4, 300–1, 305, 311–12, 320, 323, 362
as theory of virtue, 159*n*, 278*n*
Bible
Acts, 294*n*
Corinthians, 183, 264*n*
Ezekiel, 266*n*
Galatians, 138 & *n*
Genesis, 137 & *n*
Hebrews, 188*n*
Isaiah, 125*n*, 227*n*
Job, 144, 182 & *n*, 192*n*, 199*n*, 264*nn*, 305*n*
John, 63*n*, 192 & *n*, 294*n*
Luke, 239*n*, 272*n*
Matthew, 275*n*
Micah, 2
Proverbs, 192*n*
Psalms, 63*n*
Romans, 145*n*, 234*n*, 294*n*
Wisdom of Solomon, 82*n*
body, 10, 29–30, 32, 39–42, 43, 44
body/mind, analogous progress of, 277
botany, 281
British Library, xxiii

candour, 68, 126, 132, 229, 274–5, 279, 307, 334
Catholics, Roman, 19, 89
cause/causation, xvi, 26–7, 28, 30, 33–8, 229
Aristotle on, 210
Descartes on, 210
efficient, 28, 32–3, 37–8, 41, 42, 44, 202–5, 212, 250–1
final, 36, 250
first, 28, 30, 250, 252
formal, 36
Hume on, 205, 212–13, 249–50
instrumental, 36
Leibniz on, 210
by love and strife, 210
material, 36
metaphysical meaning of, 250
natural belief in, 229
in natural philosophy, 251
occasional, 36, 41, 44
Platonic idea of, 210
Priestley on, 205, 248–52
Pythagoreans on, 210
subordinate, 210
cause/effect, 13, 350
meaning of words, 202–6
character, 66, 76–7, 85, 89, 102, 104, 150, 181–4, 189, 219, 258, 361
ideal, 193
regard to, 102, 104
charity, 275, 285, 289, 311–12, 319
chemistry, 326
child/-ren, 48, 51, 78–9, 86–8, 89, 90, 92–3, 96, 100, 113–14, 152, 186, 219, 224–5, 279, 300

government of, 225
injury to, 312, 315
mental faculties, 186–7
and parent(s), 71
China, 43
Church of England, 72
Church of Scotland, ix
citizen(s)
duties of, 149
education of, 148–9
Civilians, 284, 287
command, 48–50
common sense, 58, 82, 131, 136, 153, 173, 235, 288, 296, 300, 346
dictate of, 230
and first principles, 270
commonwealth, 139, 172
community, 119–20, 274
compassion, 115–17, 121*n*, 126, 143, 274, 276, 303, 305, 322
conception, 7–11, 13, 14, 24, 28, 29, 30, 32–3, 47–8, 51, 52, 78
direct/relative, 9–11
conscience, 109, 118, 138, 139, 170, 175, 179, 180, 183, 185, 186–95, 237, 268, 277, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 299–300, 304, 306, 312, 314, 317, 327
authority of, 192
being without, 149–50
and good upon the whole, 159
as moral principle, 159
natural judgement of, 308
sense of duty, 159
consciousness, 8–9, 20–3, 30, 349–50
consent, 328–9, 340, 342
constitution, human/human nature, 6, 44, 57, 67, 75, 84, 90, 95, 101, 103, 105–6, 110, 114, 117, 118, 120, 121, 124, 126, 127, 129–30, 145, 163–4, 171, 176, 177*n*, 181, 184, 188, 189, 193, 194, 228, 229, 234, 294, 301, 303, 315, 317, 322, 323, 326, 330, 331, 357, 362
and active power, 204
and government, 148
intention of, 273–4
and language, 331–3
natural beliefs of, 231–2
perfection of, 192, 194
and principle of causation, 202
and rational principles, 153
and sociability, 330–5
Stoic view of, 162, 273
and temptation, 137–8
vs metaphysics, 348
of wild man, 85
contingency, 29–30
knowledge of *see* prescience and contingency
contract(s), 171, 315, 327–44
injury, to 312–13
and purpose/intention, 336–7
rights in, 313
and will to engage vs to perform, 336–7, 342–3
convention, 329
convivium, 109
courage, 53, 99–100, 117, 122, 123, 129, 336
creation, 5, 172, 225, 226, 260, 264, 346
happiness of, 120
crime and voluntariness, 224–5
Critical Review, *The*, xix
cultivation, culture, 42–4

definition, 7–8, 329
Deity *see* God
deliberation, 60, 63–4, 66, 69, 70, 72, 78, 106, 229–30
deodand, 72
desire(s), 99–106
acquired, 105
and sensation, 92–3, 95–7
and will, 46–50
determination *see* liberty of determination
dignity, human, 5, 45, 103, 122, 185, 362–3
disapprobation, 182–3, 185
discipline, 6, 44, 45, 98, 103, 197
disinterest, 77, 159*n*, 164, 166, 167, 194, 302, 303
disposition, 133, 141, 142–6, 147, 150, 263, 276, 291, 334–5
divinity *see* God
Dublin, xviii
dulce, 302, 312
dumbness, 332–3, 335
duty/-ies, xv, 52, 57, 58, 65, 67, 97, 98, 104, 121, 138, 141, 154, 164, 177,

178, 271, 282–8, 291–2, 294, 311, 359
acquired/adventitious, 313*n*
equal among humanity, 274–5
to God, 276, 282
and good, 164–5
and happiness, 167–8
of humanity/charity/benevolence, 275, 285, 289, 311–12, 319
indefinable notion, 169
of justice, 285
military, 149
of natural religion, 195
to others, 282,
plain path of, 277–8
rational motive, 219
regard for, 166–74, 193, 194
and rights, *see* rights and duty/-ies
to self, 282
sense of, 65, 104, 138, 140, 149, 159, 165, 167, 174–80, 304, 305
sense of, being without, 149–50
system of, 274*n*, 275, 282*n*, 285, 286
three Christian, 282
three heads of, 282
see also obligation

Edinburgh, xvii, 84
Edinburgh, Royal Society of, xviii
Edinburgh, University of, xvii
education, 44, 68, 103, 120, 170, 227, 327
intellectual, 187–8
moral, 187–8, 278–83
social, 148
elation, dist. depression, 144–5
eminent domain, 319
emotion, 97, 136*n*, 183, 185, 353
emulation, 124–7, 139, 274
end(s) *see* value
England, 142
English Review, *The*, xix
ens rationis, 214
envy, 107, 123, 126, 127, 135, 144, 263, 303
Epicureans/Epicureanism, xv, 77, 99*n*, 104*n*, 109, 117–18, 172, 184, 262, 272*n*, 283*n*, 290, 302–3, 337
and friendship, 117–18
and Hume, 212, 302
equity, 223, 226, 275, 321
esteem, 117, 181–3, 197, 349
desire of, 99–106
ethics, x–xi, 282*n*
practical, xv, ix–x, 282*n*
practical/theoretical, 282–3
speculative, ix
theory of/theoretical, x–xi, xv
evidence, 85–8
evil, permission of, 259–9
exchange, 43, 318
existence
contingent/necessary, 29–30
experience, 25–7, 32–3

faculty, moral, 132, 170, 175, 176, 179, 180, 185, 186–7, 193, 195 304, 306, 326–7, 347–8, 349, 352, 357
as sense or conscience, 299–300
theories of, 278*n*
faculty, intellectual, 360–1
faculty, natural, 185
faculty, rational, 85–6
favour, dist. injury, 115, 126, 132, 306, 309–11
feeling(s)
and affection(s), 108
and sentiment, 353, 356–7, 360–1
feeling/sensation and desire, 348
feeling/sensation vs judgement/thought, 218–19, 301–2, 313, 346–53, 357–8, 361
fideism, Hume and, 268*n*
fidelity/veracity, 229, 262, 263, 296, 304, 313, 315, 333–5, 341
flattery, 77, 100
fortitude, 58, 138, 160, 162, 163, 235, 272, 275, 282, 301, 362
freedom and obedience, 148
freedom *see* liberty
friendship, 115, 117–18, 139, 303, 305, 322

Gades, 161
Ganges, the, 42, 161
generosity, 189, 276, 320, 322, 359
genius, 61, 125
geometry, 80–2, 277 281
Glasgow, 84, 289*n*, 339*n*
Glasgow Literary Society, xii–xiii, xv, 27*n*, 46*n*, 59*n*, 74*n*, 92*n*, 106*n*, 124*n*,

133*n*, 152*n*, 196*n*, 213*n*, 328*n*, 344*n*
Glasgow University Library, xii*n*
Glasgow, University of, x–xii, 260*n*, 282*n*
  Reid's lectures at, x–xi, xv, 274*n*
God, 18, 45, 72, 75, 94, 101, 113, 117, 120, 126, 144, 145, 146, 166, 180, 182, 184, 187, 190, 194, 197, 201, 221, 227, 228, 231, 239, 240, 243, 258, 259, 264, 265, 268, 273, 278, 292, 294, 304, 305, 317, 319, 331, 333, 334, 337, 346, 354, 363
  Almighty, 35, 38, 39, 117, 210, 225, 226, 229, 259, 264, 316
  Author of nature/our being, 18, 31, 52, 75, 84, 106, 110, 116, 121, 187, 189, 229, 245, 251, 309, 332, 335
  Creator, 122, 187, 199, 241, 277, 313
  Deity/deity, 195, 202, 212, 225, 236, 242, 244, 247, 251, 252, 253, 255, 258, 261, 262, 263, 264, 276
  Deity, moral perfection of, 215, 362–3
  Deity, proof of, 212
  Divine Nature, the, 166
  duty to, 276, 282
  father, 158
  First Cause, 210, 212, 241, 243
  great Geometrician, 82
  and happiness of creation, 262–6
  image of, 263
  Judge, 227, 228, 255, 362
  justice of, 266
  laws of, 226, 273, 276, 294
  and laws of nature, 223–4, 225, 251, 257
  Lord, 192 266
  Maker, 5, 30, 38, 48, 54, 90, 124, 137, 146, 191, 192, 198, 228, 231, 237, 269, 293, 317, 331, 362
  moral attributes of, 262–6
  natural government by, 225
  and obligation, 159*n*
  prescience of, 253–9
  providence of, 247, 260*n*, 276
  Searcher of hearts, 63, 234
  and sufficient reason, 244–5
  Supreme Being, 29, 31, 42, 185, 225, 226, 227, 252, 261, 263, 362
  Supreme Cause, 38
  Supreme Governor, 226, 227
  veracity of, 229
good
  and duty, 164–5
  material/formal, 298–9
  of others, 95, 166–7, 309
  public/common/of society, 306–7, 314, 319, 323–4, 326
good upon the whole, 53, 65, 154–68, 193, 194
  and conscience, 159
  defects of principle, 164–8
  and duty, 164
  tendencies of principle, 159–64
good, own, 166–7, 300–1
  as principle of virtue, 272–3
goods of body/fortune/mind, 160
Gospel, the, 272*n*
government, 44
  civil/political, 114, 116, 148–9, 168, 197, 224, 234, 247
  divine, 225, 226, 247, 251, 266
  by law, 222–3
  and liberty, 221–8
  mechanical, 221–8
  medicine of the mind, 148
  moral, 168, 195, 197, 221–8
  and opinion, 148–9
grammar, 90, 350, 351
gratitude, 114–15, 117, 131, 132, 139, 147, 166, 171, 195, 274, 276, 294, 303, 305, 309–11, 320, 337, 349, 353, 361
gravitation, 33–4, 37, 211

Haarlem, xiii–xiv
habit, x*n*, 44, 48, 52, 62, 67, 68, 70–3, 78–80, 88–91, 106, 113, 120, 122, 148–9, 170, 188, 190, 197–9, 221, 225, 234, 235, 271, 273, 279–80, 314, 327
  of understanding/of will, 69
happiness, 44, 109, 166–8, 169, 183–4, 185, 193, 194
  greatest sum of, 263–4
  as rational motive, 219
Heaven, 42, 43, 45, 316
Hercules, 161, 162*n*, 163
history, natural, 79
Holland, 43
honestum, 171–2, 173, 192, 302
honour, 5, 99, 104, 105, 169–71, 173, 179,

180, 182, 186, 217, 277, 280, 286, 304, 306, 327
sense of, 144, 182
humanity, virtue/duty/laws of, 132, 164, 183, 185, 272, 275, 285, 289, 298, 303, 322, 323
humility, 14, 145
humour, good/bad, 76, 143–4, 150
hurt *see* injury
hypothesis/-es, 8, 37, 76, 211*n*, 247, 264, 341, 344, 345, 356–7

ideas
association of, 77, 87–8
innate, 20, 327
Locke on, 8–9, 205
simple, 20–2, 23
ideas and impressions, 8, 23–4
system of, 344–5
idiots, 152, 172, 233, 238
idolatry & polytheism in philosophy, 208
imagination, 61, 93, 140
and passion, 325*n*
imitation, 84–6, 88, 89, 363
indifference, 291–2
in morals, 98, 161, 177, 182, 191–2
in motivation, 51, 56, 62, 74
indiscernibles, Leibniz on identity of, 244*n*, 245
induction, 23, 37, 165, 302
ingratitude, 307, 356–7
injury, 306, 309–15, 317, 320–1, 326, 335
dist. hurt, 127–8, 131–2
kinds of, 312
and rights, 312–14, 324
injustice, 66, 132, 195, 306–20, 325
innocence, state of, 138, 231
instinct, x*n*, 5–6, 48, 52, 78–88, 89, 90, 93, 106, 111, 122, 128–9, 143*n*, 198, 273, 295*n*, 326–7, 335
in animals, 31–2, 42, 190, 225, 317
instruction *see* education
intention, 31, 41, 48, 82, 84–5, 88, 89, 92, 97, 129, 131, 152, 229, 296, 298, 309–10, 361
of God, 5, 48
of nature, 43, 102, 105, 115, 124, 130, 178, 191, 273–4
in promising, 336, 340–3
interest, 65, 77, 97, 98, 121, 135, 158, 165, 167, 172, 178, 200, 235, 278*n*, 304, 307, 311, 335
and honour, 169–70
private, 300
regard to, 102
sense of, 168–9
Israel, 266
ius quæsitum, 235*n*

Jesuits, 260*n*
judge or feeler, 358
judgment, 52–6, 58, 62–5, 68, 70, 72, 85, 92, 98, 152–3, 157, 163, 176, 191, 196–7 180; *see also* feeling/sensation
moral, 176–7, 181–3, 186, 188, 194, 272, 277–83, 288, 290–3, 295, 297, 306, 308–9, 325*n*
and reason, 153
Jupiter, 50
jurisprudence, 147
laws of, 71
writers on, 313, 314, 315, 319
jurisprudence, natural, 67*n*, 195, 282*n*, 285*n*
and morals, 283–4
systems of, 278, 283–90
jus, 284
justice, 66–7, 71, 164, 178, 185, 195, 275, 282, 362
Aristotelian notion of, 324
an artificial virtue, 294–5, 301–45, 337–43
and benevolence, 115
branches of, 312–16, 318, 319, 324–5, 319
and favour, 132
of God, 266
and injury, 132, 312–14
regard to, 193
strict vs extensive, 285–6
and utility, 305–6

King's College, ix
knave, the sensible, 307–9
knowledge, desire of, 99–106

labour, 317–18
language
ambiguity of, 28, 34, 47, 202, 206–13
arguments from, 5, 13–20, 30, 33,

34–5, 37, 49, 55, 60, 74, 77–8, 107–8, 136, 152–3, 157, 169, 201, 204, 205, 207–9, 216, 240, 284, 314, 350–6, 358, 361
of arithmetic, 208
an art, 89–90
artificial, 141, 331
natural, 141, 331–2
poetic, 206–7
and social acts of mind, 330
law of nature and nations, 278, 283, 287
law, civil *see* law, Roman
law(s), 6, 53, 57, 98
of England, 71
of God, 226, 273, 276, 294
government by, 222–3, 236–7
of humanity, 322
of jurisprudence, 71
and liberty, 200
moral, 6, 197
of nations, 71, 195
of nature (phys.), 37–8, 44, 45, 88, 130, 147, 210, 211, 214, 223–4, 251–2
of nature/natural (moral), 138, 178, 251–2, 287–8
of police, 71
political/civil, 44, 131, 139, 148, 197, 224, 286–7, 318, 325–6
and punishment/reward, 220–1
and reason, 168
Roman, 66–7, 284, 287, 328
Scottish, 235n
threefold object of, 284–5
law(s) of nature, 281, 324
and causation, 251
moral and physical distinguished, 251–2
and providence, 246–7
laws/rules of justice, 66, 71*n*, 72, 224, 306, 320–6
Leverhulme Trust, viii
liberty, xxi
and accountability, 236–40
of action, belief in, 228–36
of action, and causation, 248–51
of action/agent, xi, xiii–xv, 59, 196–270
Christian, 200
civil, 200
of determination, 243–6
dist. capriciousness, 220, 243, 253
and external force, 200
and government, 221–8
injury to, 312, 315
moral, 196–202, 226, 227–43
and motives, 213–28
natural, 200
vs necessity, 200
vs obligation, 200
and reward/punishment, 220–1
right to, 200, 284, 313, 317
and volition, 196–202
logic, 9, 90, 250, 329 330
London, xvii, xviii, 66, 82
love, 35, 107, 108, 118–19, 140, 142, 147, 210, 349

madness, 52–3, 131, 134, 199, 224, 233–4, 238, 239
man *see* constitution, human
manuscripts, Reid's, vii, x–xi, xii–xiii*n*, xvii
Marischal College, ix
materialism, xii
implied by necessity, 267
mathematics, 61, 80–2, 179, 237, 362
axioms of, 223
proposition of, 70
matter, 76, 90
power of, 33–4
means *see* value
means/end *see* reason and means/end; will to means/end
Medes, the, 103*n*
medicine, 147, 326
of the mind/art of government, 148
melancholy, 77, 134, 143*n*, 145–6, 199
memory, 10, 22, 180, 191, 268
Hume on, 8
and prescience, 258–9
metamorphosis, 113
metaphysics/metaphysician, xiii, 244, 250, 260, 283, 289, 291, 293–6, 298, 308, 328, 337 348
Middle Ages, 159*n*, 193
mind, 10
operation of, 8, 10, 17, 20, 21, 47, 59–60, 63, 65
qualities of, and moral judgement, 301–2, 305
social act of, 50, 330–4, 342–3

solitary act of, 50, 330–1, 336, 342
structure of, 191
mineralogy, 281
miracles, 244, 247, 251
monad(s), 36, 210
money, desire of, 105
monogamy, 178
Monthly Review, *The*, xix
'moral', meaning of, 177 & *n*
moral principle, the, 159
moralist(s), 165, 183
ancient, 152, 157–8, 160–2, 272, 276, 282*n*, 285, 290, 298, 316, 347
modern, 95, 272, 276, 278*n*, 282, 290, 291*n*, 347
morals, 147, 195
corruption of, 280
first principles of, 223, 270–8, 355
four cardinal virtues of, 282
general principles/practice, 280–1
dist. other sciences, 281
philosophy of, 155
practical, 290–1
science of, 223, 278, 281
systems of, 278–83
theory of, 290–1, 322
theory of, dist. practical ethics, 282–3
three duties of, 282
motion, 7–8, 29–30, 36–7, 39–41, 44, 82–4, 206–7, 210, 214, 222, 242–3, 251, 281, 345
motive(s), 74–5
and action, 215–16, 291–9
animal, 218
axiom of strongest, 216–17
dist. cause/act, 214
inferring action from, 220
and liberty/necessity, 213–21
rational, 218–20
resistance to, 216
strength of, 216–21
and virtue *see* virtue and motive
and will, 46–7
Muses, the, 119*n*
music, 82, 141, 179, 283, 312
mystics/mysticism, 77, 159*n*, 193, 278*n*

National Library of Scotland, xiii
nature, 28, 30, 43, 44, 52, 62, 78–80, 87, 94, 96, 97, 102, 104, 107, 113, 115, 118, 121, 124, 131, 151, 190, 225
causation in, 209–13
a grand machine, 225–6
intention of, 178, 273–4
state of, 131, 315, 318, 324, 325, 334, 338–40
wisdom of, 333
nature, human *see* constitution, human
necessitarianism, xi–xii, xx, xxi
necessity, philosophical, 230–2, 235–6, 242–3
and approbation, 198
arguments for, 243–59
and atheism, 208
and divine prescience, 253–9
and futurity, 254–5
inference from materialism, 267
moral, 196–202
and motives, 213–21
and reward/punishment, 220–1, 227–8
and scepticism, 229
in Spinoza, 212
system of, 198, 212, 226, 227, 230, 240, 253
New Machar, ix
Nile, the, 42
Noah, 127
nyctophobia, Priestley's, 232*n*

obligation, 6, 170–1, 173–4, 179, 223, 236–8, 306, 311, 315, 320, 325, 326, 327–44
and ability, 237–9
conditions for, 174
indefinable, 173
moral, 227
a relation, 173
and will of God, 159*n*
officium, 95*n*, 172, 173
medium, perfectum, rectum, 298
opinion, 146–9
and animals, 147–8
and government, 148–9
in morals, 157–8
of others, regard to, 104
optics, 178
orang-utan, 340 & *n*
orators, 59, 114, 134, 193, 332
ought, the, 171, 173, 352, 354–5
Oxford English Dictionary, 177*n*

pactum, 328
pain, and compassion, 116–17
Paris, Parliament of, 72
Parnassus, 119
passion(s), 48, 52–4, 55, 56–9, 58, 62, 63–5, 69, 72, 77, 133–42, 326–7
  and affections, 107–8
  in ancient philosophy, 134–5
  in Hume, 135, 136, 157
  in Hutcheson, 135
  and imagination, 325n
  and reason, 134–6, 138–9, 153, 157, 163, 185, 347
  selfish, 135, 139, 276, 331
  and will, 46
peace *see* war and peace
Peripatetic(s) *see* Aristotle/Aristotelian
person
  as cause, 201
  injury to, 312–13, 315
perturbation, 107, 133, 136
Philadelphia, xviii
Philosopher(s), 8, 10, 12, 13, 19, 24, 25–7, 33–4, 46, 54, 75, 93, 100, 110, 118, 131, 133, 164, 165, 175, 236, 247, 267, 329, 330, 344–5, 347–8, 352, 353, 354
  ancient, 58, 120, 139, 159, 171–2, 258
  British, 77
  Greek, 77
  on liberty and necessity, 199, 200, 205
  modern, xiv, xxi*n*, 8, 56, 101, 120, 135, 159, 213, 254, 300, 344, 348, 351, 358
  and natural beliefs, 232
  and the vulgar, 56
philosophy
  and ambiguity of causation, 207–1
  and atheism, 208
  of the human mind, 75
  and idolatry, 208
  natural, 33–4, 37–8, 61, 179, 209
philosophy, moral
  Reid's lectures on, 282*n*
  systems of, 278
physics, 326
piety, 144, 194, 276, 362
pity, 108, 115, 121, 128, 169, 183, 191, 198, 234
Platonism/-ts, 77, 159*n*, 210
pleasure(s), 77, 101, 302, 312
pneumatology, x, xi, 282*n*, 330
poetry, 16, 114, 119, 134, 141, 161
Poets, the, 109, 118, 143, 207
politics, science of, x, 71*n*, 147, 179, 282 & *n*
polygamy, 178
Portugal, 116
power(s), 8–9, 11–12, 28, 229
  Almighty, 204
  conception of, 8–11, 204–5
  consciousness of, 8–9
  desire of, 18–20, 99–106
  dist. exertion, 203
  human, 38–45
  Hume on, 9, 18–19, 22–7
  intellectual/speculative, 5–6, 12, 82, 191, 193, 195, 209, 345–6
  Locke on, 20–2
  moral, 282–3, 290
  passive, 20–2
  and right, 322
  power(s), speculative, 5, 12, 21
  and will, 196–202, 229–30, 233–5
power(s), active, xi, xxi, 5–6, 7–20, 27–33, 33–6, 38, 51, 74–5, 191, 193, 290
  and accountability, 236–40
  and causation, 202–13
  and government, 222–3, 226
  meaning of phrase, 203
  natural belief in, 228–36
  and reason, 226–7
prayer, nature of, 247
prescience
  and contingency, 255–9
  of God, and evil, 259–69
  of God, and necessity, 253–9
  and memory, 258–9
  dist. science, 260
pride, 24, 144–5, 181, 268
principle(s)
  moral, 193
  selfish, 101
  see also action, principles of
principle(s), first, 26, 177–9, 195
  dist. deductive reasoning, 270
  of moral reasoning, 176–80
  and proof/evidence, 270, 276–7
profession, choice of, 66

progress, 339
promise(s), 18, 171, 190, 230–1, 327–44
  and language, 341–3
  presuppositions, of 230
  see also contract(s)
property, 284–5, 307, 313–20, 322, 323–7
  common, 316
  injury to, 312–13, 324
propriety, 52, 170
Protestants, 19
providence, 113, 260*n*, 319
  and laws of nature, 246–7, 251
prudence, 31, 44, 89, 125, 163, 169, 282, 311
  and virtue, 272
Ptolemaic system, 208
public spirit, 119–20
punishment, 71, 72, 103, 130, 131, 132, 307
punishment/reward, and liberty/necessity, 220–1
purpose, fixed, 60, 65–9, 70, 72–3, 305, 336
Pythagoreans, 139, 172 & *n*, 210

quality/-ies
  moral, 195
  primary/secondary, 10, 345, 351–2

rank(s)/class, 75, 85, 89, 99, 119, 170, 274, 286, 306
rationalists, ethical, 175*n*, 278*n*
reason, 52, 92, 93, 106, 113, 120, 125, 126, 129, 132, 199
  and active power, 172–3, 226–7
  and desire, 102, 106–7
  and good upon the whole, 163
  Hume on, 153, 352–3, 355–6
  and judgment, 153
  and means/end, 153–4, 240–3, 360–1
  as moral faculty, 278*n*
  and passion, 55–9, 63–5, 77, 134–6, 138–9, 153, 157, 163, 185, 347
  practical, 157
  regulating action, 152–4
  regulating belief, 152
  scheme of virtue, 159*n*, 278*n*
  speculative, 157
reason, sufficient
  and laws of nature, 246–7
  Leibniz on, 243–7
  principle of, 243–8
  schoolmen on, 244
reasoning, 327
  and first principles, 176–7, 270
rectitude, 67, 166, 167, 168–74, 236, 258, 292, 295, 301
reflection, 20–2, 24, 47, 77, 86, 101, 120, 130–1, 155, 205, 277, 279, 326, 344
  way of, xxi
relation(s), moral, 173, 195, 354–5, 359
religion, 125, 145, 362
  Christian, 146
  corruption of, 280
  false principles of, 77
religion, natural
  duties of, 195
  principles of, 194
religion, zeal for
  depreciates reason, 268
remorse vs self-approbation, 158–9, 182–4, 230
reputation, 54, 99, 103, 104, 162, 170, 304
  injury to, 71, 182, 312–13, 315
  right to, 313
resentment, 124, 126, 127–32, 139, 309–11, 313–14, 316–17, 321, 326, 335, 349
  deliberate, 128, 131–2
  passion of, 135–6
  sudden/instinctive/animal, 127–31
resolution *see* purpose, fixed
revelation, 236, 263, 268, 280
rhetoric/rhetoricians, 59, 90, 193, 350, 351
right(s)
  acquired, 235*n*, 287, 313, 315, 324
  adventitious, 313*n*
  common, 316
  contractual, 313
  dual meaning of, 284
  and duties, 284–5
  external, 285–6
  innate, 313, 315, 324, 327
  legal meaning of, 284
  to liberty, 284, 313, 317
  to life, 317
  of mankind/men, 284–7, 289
  natural/of nature, 131, 313, 317, 318, 324

of peace and war, 283
perfect vs imperfect, 285–6, 289
personal, 284–5
and power, 322
to property *see* property
real *see* property
to reputation, 313
to safety of family, 313
to safety of person, 313
statutory, 325
system of, 285, 286, 287
right/wrong, 158–9, 169, 170, 171, 174, 175, 176, 177, 180, 290, 299–300, 326, 335
Rome, Romans, 61, 287, 332
Royal Faculty of Procurators of Glasgow, xiii*n*
Royal Society of London, Transactions of, 81

St Andrews University Library, xxiii
St Andrews, University of, viii
St Peter's Basilica, 60
Sardanapalus, 103 & *n*, 161, 162*n*, 163
savage(s)/rude ages, 16, 18, 99, 130, 189, 230, 314, 318, 331, 333, 338–9
American, 53
Canadian, 116, 234
and idea of causation, 206–7
and sociability, 331, 333–5
scepticism, 202, 268–9
Bayle's, 268*n*
and doctrine of necessity, 228–9
of Hume, 250
sceptic(s), 9, 176
and belief in senses, 232
science, 89
and first principles, 178 & *n*
scientia media, 260–2
Schools/Schoolmen, the, 36, 77, 159*n*, 193, 214, 216, 244
Scots Philosophical Club, viii
self-approbation, 54, 158–9, 163; *see also* remorse
self-command, -government, 5, 44, 52, 63, 67–8, 95*n*, 97, 98, 102, 104, 136, 140, 149–50, 190, 197, 198, 218, 219, 225, 234, 235, 272, 274
duties of, 275
and madness, 233
self-esteem, 181–2
self-evidence/-t truth, proposition, 5, 28, 31, 35, 63, 157, 192, 216, 223, 230, 237, 248, 308, 312, 355
and first principles, 270, 276–7
in morals, 275–7
self-interest, 307
as theory of virtue, 278*n*
selfish passions *see* passions
selfish principle, 95, 101–2, 107, 159*n*, 166, 167, 173, 272*n*
selfish system, 99*n*, 104, 110*n*, 159*nn*, 272*n*
self-love, 77, 95, 102, 110, 120, 145, 159*n*, 175*n*, 275, 303
sensation, 20–2, 24
and desire, 92–3, 95–7
see also feeling
sense, moral, 56, 89, 170, 175, 185, 300, 352–3
and external senses, 175–6
sense(s), external, 8–9, 10, 20–3, 210, 300, 326, 327, 345, 348, 351–2
judgment of, 175–6
and moral sense, 175–6, 179–80
testimony of, 308
sense(s), internal, 56, 351
sentiment(s)
moral, 104, 175, 326
in morals, 278n, 326–7, 344*n*
system of, 278*n*
sign(s), 301, 330, 332
natural, 116, 122, 141
see also language
society
of mankind, 274
and moral education, 279–80
political/civil, 125, 131, 149, 172*n*, 287, 318–19, 321, 324, 325, 326
society/social living, 85, 102, 105–6, 110–11, 121, 123
discipline of, 104
soul, 206, 305
and causation, 206–7
loss of, 145–6
sovereignty, 288, 319*n*
Spain, 116
speculation vs action, practice, nature, 5, 21, 165, 171, 180, 187, 188, 232–3, 241, 268–9, 307, 327–8, 355

stages of society, 339*n*
state/commonwealth, 119, 139, 148, 172, 288, 325
Stoic(s)/Stoicism, 77, 95, 134, 158, 162, 272*n*, 273, 283*n*, 290, 291*n*, 298*n*
  virtue, 160–1
  wise man of, 192–3
sympathy, 108, 116, 128, 141, 175*n*, 183–4, 191, 298, 300–1
  and benevolent affection, 121
  system of, 278*n*
Syracuse, 61
system(s), 75, 139, 287
  of botany, 281
  of duties, 274*n*, 282*n*, 285, 288
  of Empedocles, 35*n*, 210
  Epicurean, 77, 262, 290, 302–3
  fanatical, 323–4
  of geometry, 281
  Hobbes', 315
  Hume's, 18–19, 249–50, 294, 299, 301–5, 312, 323, 345–6
  of ideas & impressions, 344–5
  of law, 287
  Leibniz's, 244–5, 247
  of liberty, 226–7, 235, 253, 262, 264
  material, 42–3, 76, 210
  of mineralogy, 281
  moral, 277, 281–3, 285–7, 289, 341, 354
  of natural jurisprudence, 286, 288
  of necessity, 198, 212, 226, 230, 240, 253, 262–5
  nervous, 96
  Peripatetic, 77
  Planetary, 29, 37–8, 242
  Plato's, 77, 172, 210
  Ptolemaic, 208
  Pythagoras', 210
  of revelation, 236
  of rights, 285–6, 289
  selfish, 99*n*, 104*n*, 110*n*, 159*n*, 272*n*
  of sentiments, 278*n*
  social, 334
  Spinoza's, 212, 252
  Stoic, 77, 95*n*, 162, 290
  of sympathy, 278*n*

taste, moral/aesthetic, 54–5, 56, 180, 345, 352, 357–60
temper, natural, and animal principles, 149–50
temperance, 160, 162, 163, 185, 282, 362
temptation, 137–8
testimony, 87, 171, 178–80, 308, 333–4
  of nature, 176
  of senses, 348
Teylers Godgeleerd Genootschap, xiii–xiv
theism, 262, 264
theology, 147
  Calvinist, 260*n*
  natural, x
  Reformed Orthodox, 260*n*
Thistle, Order of the, 130*n*
thought, dist. body, 20, 29–30, 39, 41, 44
truth, 188–9
  contingent, 29
  necessary, 26, 28, 29–30, 32

understanding, 5, 27–9, 31, 33, 46, 59–60, 188–9; *see also* reason
utensils, 317–18
utile, 172, 173, 302, 312
utility
  as moral principle, 299, 302–6, 311–27
  public, 312, 314, 315, 318–19, 323–7
utopian speculation, 149

value
  of end, 54, 359–61
  of means, 54
Vatican, the, 60
Venice, 43
Verbandingenraakende den Naturalyken en Geopenbaarden Goasdienst, xiv*n*
virtue(s), xv, 5, 31, 44, 52, 58, 63, 66–7, 70–3, 89, 97, 98, 102, 120, 125, 126, 138, 163–4, 271, 300–1
  artificial/natural, 294, 295, 301–27, 337–43
  cardinal, 282, 285, 341
  conflict between, 276
  discipline of, 104
  hierarchy of, 276
  love of/regard for, 166–7, 193–4
  and motive, 337–43
  and piety, 194
  and pleasure, 54–5
  pride of, 144
  sentimental theory of, 282*n*

social, 274
Stoic definition of, 95, 162
theory/-ies of, 278*n*, 355–6; *see also* morals, theory of
virtue/vice, 299–300, 307, 352, 354, 355–7, 362
distinction of, 232
general principles of, 270–1
particular principles of, 271–6
volition/willing, 17, 29, 40–1, 46–51, 52, 65–6, 82–5, 240, 243
transient vs permanent, 70–1

war
laws/rights of, 283, 321
and peace, 288
Westminster Confession, 264*n*
will, xi, xxi, 5, 27–33, 46–73, 74, 88, 89, 92, 97, 98, 106, 152, 361
act(s) of *see* volition/willing
determination of, 196–202
and effort, 50–1
Hutcheson on, 135
infinite series of acts of, 199
and judgment, 52, 196–7
to means/end, 201
and power, 50, 196–202, 229–30, 233–5
and understanding, 46, 59–60, 196–7
wisdom, 5, 31, 44, 52, 58, 63, 89, 117, 157, 160, 362
wise man, 160, 162, 192–3
worth, moral, 5, 6, 144, 162, 163, 169, 176, 179, 180–3, 185–6